A Quarterly of New Literature

ACCENT

ROGER MARTIN DU GARD:
Confidence Africaine

RICHARD WRIGHT:
The Man Who Lived Underground

KATHERINE ANNE PORTER:
Affectation of Praehiminincies

KENNETH BURKE:
Motives and Motifs in the Poetry of Marianne Moore

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The Writing of Edmund Wilson

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ACCENT

A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE

Volume 2, Number 3 Spring, 1942

KATHERINE ANNE PORTER:

Affectation of Praehiminincies

Maria Mather bore many children, some of them afflicted, and she accepted all her griefs and theirs with formal resignation. Not so much with this first child, Cotton. She spent on him the freshness of her maternal passion as if there would never be another. Stray glimpses of her, caught through a web of small-chronicle, show her praying and fasting for his sake, careful that his first words should be a prayer. Cotton seemed sound enough after the first precarious months of his life: in his second year he was undeniably frail, and when he formed his first pious words, his parents were horrified to discover that he stammered. There was no defect in the organ of speech, it was a nervous condition, and he could not utter a word without a painful struggle.

Dedicated as he was to the church, family pride, family reputation, family vocation were all at stake and in a fair way to be lost. It was obvious to the young parents that the devil had made an immediate assault upon an enemy he had reason to fear even in the cradle. They communicated their dismay to the child. The fate of his soul and the success of his career in the world were identified in earliest impressions with the necessity for loosening the catch in his speech. With precocious understanding he sat in his oak high chair, brought from England by grandfather Mather, and prayed to be cured of his stammer.

When he was three years old, he could read and spell, and his serious education began in the free school of Mr. Benjamin Thompson. Family legend contends that he was an apostle from the first, and stammer or no,

he began at once to lead his schoolmates in prayer. At playtime he preached little sermons to them. The feebler wits of the school listened and were impressed, but sturdier spirits made fun of him, poked him and pinched him when the master was not by, and gave him the joy of suffering for his principles. Increase Mather liked to believe that his child was a saint at three years, and resented the treatment he received. He encouraged him in his unutterable priggishness, and soothed his vanity by explaining that persecution was the fate of good souls in a wicked world. He also cautioned the schoolmaster to be gentle with his child. The Mathers were all tender parents in an epoch of systematic brutality towards the young. Richard Mather had been so dreadfully flogged and kicked by his schoolmaster that his childhood was embittered. Much as he longed for an education, he had begged his father to take him from school. His father sympathized and persuaded him to endure for the sake of learning. Richard overlived the experience, but not the effects of it, nor the memory, and all his life he spoke against the popular cruelties against children, and was tender with his own. Increase was even more indulgent: he was almost unique in his age because he did not beat his young, but rather erred to the opposite extreme.

The special consideration he received in school gave Cotton a certain advantage over his playmates. He found himself supported in his apostolic attitude not only at home, but by public opinion, and this early became confused in his mind with the voice of God. The primer lessons were composed of moral maxims, and he learned that "The Butterfly, in gaudy Dress, the worthless Coxcomb doth express." He was offered such fallacies of natural history as "The Crocodile, with watery eyes, O'er man and every creature cries." Infant religiosity was praised in such bold rhyme-schemes as "Young Obadias, David, Josias, All were pious."

These infantile studies could not detain him long. He swallowed the primer and the horn-book, moved into the next grade, added Greek, Latin and arithmetic to his list, and proceeded upward without pause. "Zerxes the Great did die, and so must you and I . . ." was the primer lesson that stuck fast in his mind and urged him to a feverish speed. Death was at his shoulder, he might be stricken at any moment, he had no time to lose, he must hurry!

In his fifth year he resolved to be great. "He expected it, and therefore he bore and did many things, and disregarded all difficulties." This is Cotton's son Samuel, writing a long generation later, in the Mather fashion presenting with minute filial care a selected phase of his parent's career.

This inflated self-importance of the infant Cotton was a reflection of the family feeling. He was surrounded by every possible attitude of moral grandeur, a tallness and solemnity of manner utterly unrelieved by any sense of proportion. He "played saint" in imitation of his elders. And saintliness carried a certain social prestige. He went to services in a

neeting house where the pews were carefully allotted according to social osition, and he could not help seeing that he sat with his mother in the ery front pew while his father occupied the pulpit. In his dangerous recocity, he absorbed everything without discrimination, and began to mitate the methods of his elders. He soon mastered the technique of xacerbating his sensibilities in prayer, and could burst into a flood of ervous tears at the crisis of a petition, precisely as his father and mother id, and as sometimes the whole congregation did, bowing in shaken rows vhile their anguished groans ascended to heaven.

He believed that New England was the most important country in he world, and Boston the greatest city, and his family the most disting-ished of all families, and this belief remained almost unmodified into is middle age. To a natural personal arrogance the Mathers added theo-ogical pride, and a jealous vanity that showed an alarming tendency to esent slights real or apparent. People were continually uncomfortable n the presence of Increase Mather for fear they might do or say some-hing damaging to his feelings. Respect for the clergy had been an article f faith in the early colony. The outward observances of this respect sur-ived, but the spirit was weakening, and Increase was sensitive to the lightest breeze of change in this regard.

Cotton adored his father, and his grandfather Mather he revered as a olemn presence stalking through his infant days giving reproof and ad-nonition in his overpowering voice. But to his grandfather John Cotton vent his secret hero worship. He was dead, but mother and grandmother onspired to keep his memory alive in a romantic aura of all that was ourtly, superb, learned and charming in this world. The city of Boston tself was his breathing monument, and Sarah Mather could not praise im enough.[1] It was natural that the admired husband who had called her ender names should somewhat overshadow the living one with whom she hared the chilly pieties of old age. It was true that a miracle had saved ichard Mather for New England. The ship that brought him almost sank n the harbor, everyone agreed there was no natural cause why it should ave remained afloat, but God spared all for the sake of bringing Richard Iather safely to shore. This was a miracle clearly, but insignificant com-ared to the blazing comet that hovered above Boston during Grandfather otton's last sickness, disappearing on the day of his death.

A godless innkeeper had been made uncomfortable by John Cotton's resence as a guest, professing himself unable to curse and damn with nat saint under his roof. Once John Cotton had prayed for the dying nild of his bitter enemy, Pastor Wilson, and the child had recovered at nce. The man who had sworn to John Cotton's non-conformity before

1. In Boston, England, John Cotton married, as his second wife, a young widow, Sarah ory. He used to call her his "dear sweetheart and comfortable yokefellow."
Years later, Richard Mather married, as his second wife, John Cotton's widow, Sarah. the meantime, John and Sarah Cotton's daughter, Maria, had married Increase, eldest son Richard Mather. They were the parents of Cotton Mather.

the High Commission had fulfilled prophecy by dying of the plague under a hedge; Mr. Leverett, who swore to a lie in defense of John Cotton and Christ's kingdom, was even now in New England, safe with honor. His reward had been certain, visible and negotiable, the just end of virtue.

Little Cotton imbibed these stories and the system of ethics they were designed to illustrate, as revealed truth. The more marvelous the tale, the more farfetched the moral, the easier for him to believe. Daily proofs of the family greatness were shown to him. He saw his father, when involved in a doctrinal dispute, turn to Richard Mather for consultation. When Richard wished to clench an argument, he turned to the writings of John Cotton, and the disputants were silenced.

Before his milk-teeth were loosened, the child assumed the task of outpraying and outdoing these spiritual giants. His stammer grew worse, and his parents kept days of humiliation for his relief. The house was filled with lamentations of suffering souls engaged in begging off from the cruelties of an implacable, invisible Presence that hourly threatened them with fresh calamities. Cotton had thought at first it was the Devil who had tied his tongue. Now it appeared that the visitation might be from God, enraged at some mysterious failure of holiness in Cotton's soul. Appalled, much confused, he wept and implored with the others, not without some pardonable pride in his elevated situation at the very center of a divine mystery.

Cotton had been absorbing knowledge from Mr. Thompson, from his father, and from the thousand odd books on his father's shelves. It was already the finest collection in the colony, where every family of any pretension prided itself on the possession and at least a quoting knowledge of good literature. It was socially correct to be known as a great reader: respect for the learning implicit in books increased, as times passed, into a nostalgia for the world of urbane European culture, and every ship brought fresh consignments of the latest works, not all of them theological or moralistic, to adorn the homes and minds of New Englanders who leaned with undiscriminating confidence on the printed word. Increase Mather had the foundations of true learning, and he read for love, even for amusement at times; the young Cotton had the desire to be learned and above all to be called learned, and he read voraciously everything he could lay hands upon. His memory was photographic, and at six years his little head was a mere rubbish heap of printed matter. He was then turned over the famous pedagogue, Mr. Ezekiel Cheever, to be prepared for Harvard. Cheever was pious and a master of languages, and his unpleasant fondness for beating small boys caused him to enjoy a notable reputation as a disciplinarian. But he did not apply the ferule to Increase Mather's prodigious child. Even he was not so bold as that. All Boston was familiar with the father's sensitiveness about his son who was born a genius and saint besides. Cotton pursued his apostolic labors among his classmates and devoured knowledge with an inhuman persistency that would be quite

ıcredible if all the records of his later life did not bear witness to his nwearying pursuit of a single idea. This idea took on monstrous shapes nd sizes, it sprouted in a thousand variations, but it remained essentially naltered: the single aspiration of Cotton Mather to identify publicly and nmistakably his personal interests and ambitions with the will of God.

Harvard had lived up to the expectations of its founders and was the ride of New England, considered a cultural center equal to anything ngland could show. It was now an affront to local self-esteem to send romising young men to Europe for their degrees. Harvard was more han a university: it was a political hostage. Its rights, its very existence, ere bound up with the first charter, and anything that menaced the harter menaced Harvard. It was the stamping ground of the clerical arty: the whole death struggle of the theocratic state was to be enacted ere, and the times were ripening for it. The destructive third generation as rising, critical of its grandfathers, cheerfully casual about the rather usty notions of its fathers. Harvard held firmly to its original aim of tting the sons of ministers for the ministry, but many of them thus pre-ared fell away from their vocation and entered other professions, or ven went into trade. Merchants' sons who had no intention of entering he church were now admitted, a little grudgingly. It was necessary to dmit them, for otherwise they would go to England for their education nd return with minds expanded beyond the permissible limits of pro-incial life: or worse, they might not come back at all. This had happened ften enough.

A thirteenth-century schoolman would have approved the curriculum, ith its heavy emphasis on logic, rhetoric and syntax, its geometry and rithmetic and astronomy, but alas, no music. A smattering of physics, long list of dead languages, Greek, Syriac, Chaldee, Hebrew: and Latin, ow on the point of dying out as the peculiar language of scholars. The tudents read the Bible exhaustively in all languages. In addition, and his was most important, the "scholar must understand that the end of is life was to know good, and Jesus Christ which is eternal good," and o attain this they read the scriptures and prayed publicly twice a day. lasphemy was first among the seven major offenses, and its variations ere minutely classified. The sinner was punished by a flogging, attended y prayer.

Into this ample lap of learning the great Ezekiel Cheever literally icked his pupils, having first prepared them thoroughly in Greek, Latin, nd the fear of God. At twelve years Cotton Mather had absorbed all that heever could teach. On June 22, 1675, Increase Mather wrote in his iary that Cotton had gone to live at the College. "The God of all Grace e with him, and never leave nor forsake him, but bless him and make im a blessing wherever he shall be, amen!"

The president and the instructors were prepared to treat the young

genius very handsomely, granting him the same privileges and exemptions he had enjoyed under Cheever. The students were not so complacent. An unpleasant episode occurred almost at once. On the following 11th of July, Increase received dark news from his son. His cousin, John Cotton III, son of John Cotton II of Plymouth, brother of Maria, had joined with some older lads and hazed the newcomer severely. Also they made him run errands for them, and there were hints of harsher things. No doubt they were a set of young savages, but no doubt either that young Cotton Mather was supremely irritating in his assumptions of superiority, not only to the students but to the instructors. He complained with tears to his father.

Increase visited his brother-in-law at Plymouth, and commanded him to discipline his son, who was even now getting a reputation for wildness. He then called the overseers together, and laid his grievances before them. Many differences had been smouldering for a great while between Mr. Mather and the other fellows of the Corporation, and from this entirely legitimate pretext began a quarrel that brought numberless hidden grudges to light. His colleagues promised the enraged father to abolish the student custom of forcing the freshmen to act as fags for the older youths. In the matter of hazing, carried on secretly and with remarkable solidarity, they confessed themselves helpless. They would do what they could. This was merely a surface abuse, said Increase Mather. The trouble lay deeper. He was not interested in the custom itself. He merely demanded that his own son be protected from the brutalities of his classmates. This they could not promise.

Ten days afterward, the father was still seething. He rode again to Cambridge and held a long conference with acting President Orian Oakes and Mr. Thomas Danforth, a corporation member. He threatened to take Cotton from Harvard if they could not insure him respectful treatment from the students, regardless of seniority. Mr. Oakes pleaded that this would be a great mistake, very harmful to Cotton's future, and asked that he be left where he was. He assured the injured father it was nothing like so serious as Cotton seemed to think, but could give no acceptable reason why the students were mistreating him. Increase felt sure—and he was right—that the persecution was no mere boyish prank, but the material result of a true jealous animosity. The boy was at a painful age, and was mentally overgrown and bodily small and fragile. He had a beautiful face and very careful manners, and was absolutely skinless in his contact with strangers. The effort to overcome his stammer kept him in a continual nervous tension: his desire to make a perfect impression caused him to assume a fantastic preciosity of address. All his life he had been shielded, flattered and adored by his family and friends, and, except for his very first school days, he had suffered not one rumor of a world of physical shocks and psychic cruelties. His schoolmates had in them merely the very human desire to hurt and wound a creature who had

rather too easy a time of it: the perfectly savage and natural impulse to destroy what they could not understand or sympathize with. Cotton's state was pitiable, all the more so because he had nothing within himself to combat the disaster. He suffered blindly and appealed to his father: and his father, dismayed to the soul at the predicament of his adored child, could only storm and rage and provoke fresh disturbances. He left Cotton at the college and went away angry.

At the August commencement Cotton had new woes to confide. Among other things, the Fellows of the Corporation had called the students into a special meeting and had remonstrated with them severely for tattling of College affairs to the outside world. Cotton felt this was aimed at him for the crime of confiding in his parent. Increase wondered what they meant by the outside world. Was he not a member of the corporation? Cotton said the students were whispering among themselves that Increase Mather wanted to be president of Harvard, and this was the reason for his highly critical attitude towards everything that was done there.

This was a real blow. He did wish to be president, it was the dearest ambition of his life, and it galled him that a set of upstart boys had divined and spoken lightly of his closely guarded secret. At the next corporation meeting, Mather took the aggressive in earnest and provoked an open quarrel. He threatened to resign his fellowship. The Fellows and the President, he charged, had abused him in allowing his son to be abused, and they had wronged him in allowing the students to slander him by saying he wished to be president.

Mr. President Oakes was astounded and embarrassed at this frankness. He protested he had never heard of such a thing. With a great show of diplomacy he attempted to reassure Mr. Mather, and probably wished the mischief-making Cotton far away. He thought it would be a great pity if Mr. Mather resigned from his place; as Mr. Mather thought so too, and was merely waiting for an invitation to relent, that part of the business passed over swiftly. The scandal about his ambitions was more difficult. Mr. Oakes said something about this, too, but with less effect. He declared that nobody believed, or had even hinted, that Mr. Mather desired to be president. That Mr. Mather *should* some day be made president, no one had much doubt: and if there was any uneasiness in connection with this, it was simply the fear that Mr. Mather might in such an event remove the College to Boston. His prejudice against Cambridge was a matter of common knowledge.

After being driven to the wall by further arguments from the still unpacified Mr. Mather, Mr. President Oakes owned with some desperation that there were persons who thought that Mr. Mather was not always so plain and outright about things as he might be, but begged him not to let this trouble him. No doubt jealousy was at the bottom of it, for the interests of Harvard touched everyone keenly, and as for himself, he wished nothing better than to see Mr. Mather settled in the president's chair at Cambridge.

Further than this magnanimity no man could be asked to go. But Mr Mather retorted that if he should ever be persuaded to accept the presi dency of Harvard, it would be at the cost of great self-denial, and sacrifice of his personal welfare. The Mathers father and son were never to lose an occasion to repeat that every step of their lives for the public good had been accomplished at the expense of their private interests.

Mr. Oakes was tremendously impressed by this, assented to everything and promised Mr. Mather that he should be treated with more respect in the future. The discussion had shifted so subtly from its prime base that Cotton was for the moment no longer the center of attention. Mr. Thatcher and Mr. Danforth, two Fellows of somewhat progressive, or anti-Mather, tendencies, were not so agreeable, and refused point-blank to humor the whims of one that they persisted in regarding as a mere corporation member like themselves. As nothing less than complete victory would satisfy Increase Mather, he again took horse and rode to see the governor.

Leverett must have shuddered to see him coming. Mather was a gadfly to the governor and the magistrates as well as to Oakes and the Fellows. He harried their flanks in the matter of political and social reforms, as he pursued the faculty of the college with warnings about heresies and apostasies. Mather visited the magistrates in turn, admonishing them of their duties, criticizing their conduct of public affairs and laying fresh programs before them. When his advice was disregarded, as it was all too often, he fell into a fever of resentment and prayed against the enemies of God and New England and Increase Mather.

On his visit, the governor was tactful and sympathetic. He promised to intervene in the college trouble, and everything should be righted at once. Mr. Mather was to rest easy about his son. The situation simmered down a little, but nothing had been resolved. Mather kept a day of humiliation because all his labors seemed so fruitless. "I do but cumber the ground," he groaned. In this episode he perceived that the whole country was in a perilous state. The college seemed doomed to go down under its present woeful management. Moreover the Indians were again rising in force, and the English were not receiving the customary aid from God! The abomination of witchcraft seemed about to devour a people lost in atheisms. The powers of darkness appeared to be getting a firm grip on New England. He wrote to country ministers and asked them to send him particularized and authenticated instances of diabolic possessions and enchantments such as might have come to their attention. The country ministers were delighted with the idea, and highly curious documents began to come in to the North Street parsonage. Mather was much heartened by the unexpected results of his request. He decided to make a book of them, a book that should be a solemn warning and a horrid example.

(Part II of "Affectation of Praehimininicies" will appear in the Summer issue.)

ROGER MARTIN DU GARD:

Confidence Africaine

Translated by John Jamieson

Translator's Note

Confidence Africaine was first published in France in 1931. Although it is little longer than the average short story, it carried enough weight to justify the French publishers' decision to issue it as a separate small volume. It is one of the classic French *nouvelles,* perhaps superior to anything done in this form since the time of Flaubert and Merimée, and to anyone who is familiar with French fiction of the 1920's and 1930's it also offers a subtle commentary on the literary theories and practice of some of M. Martin du Gard's fellow novelists.

The story is presented as a personal confession, a form that has always attracted French novelists—from Diderot and Benjamin Constant down to Gide and Mauriac. When the confession framework is used, the essential narrative stands at one remove from the reader. The author tells us what the narrator was like, how he made his acquaintance, etc.; then he repeats what the narrator told him; and at the end he describes how the narrator now appears to him in the light of this revelation. In *Confidence Africaine,* as a further complication, the author appends to his character's narrative, which he has been copying out of an old diary of his own, a few sentences purporting to indicate the alterations he had thought of making both in the narrative and in his introduction to it, should he ever decide to use the confession as literary material. I have dwelt on this arrangement of the framework, with its calculated shifts in point of view, because I think it is largely responsible for the story's richness in overtones; the style itself, especially in the central narrative, is simple almost to baldness.

The irony of the story is directed first at the romantic theory of illicit love. The two chief characters have loved passionately and sinfully; but far from having been set apart from ordinary humanity by their sin, they are shown in their later years as perfectly commonplace, just like anybody else. It is implied that the gloomy and sinister sinners of Mauriac, Julian Green, *et al.,* are nothing but a literary convention and have very little in common with real human beings. This point is emphasized—perhaps a little overemphasized—in the "literary notes" with which the story ends. For the peaceful, prosaic ending something more dramatic must be substituted; the fat, slovenly, unappealing woman of forty must be suppressed entirely: a woman who has loved and sinned must not look like this—in a book.

At the same time the story is an answer to the critics who deplore the sexual episodes of *Les Thibaults.* They are *not* untrue to life, the author insists, and herewith he offers more and even stronger material of the same sort.

Underlying these is another and more vital theme: the impotence of even the most passionate love against such powerful agents as time, separation, and custom; *usus,* not *amor, vincit omnia.* The lover is represented as having accepted this fact with calm Latin realism. To modern readers nurtured in the romantic traditions of the last hundred and fifty years this must seem the culmination of all the irony in the story. We can't help regarding a tragic or unhappy ending—the lover's unavailing refusal to accept the changes that mere time and habit have wrought—as inevitable in a story with this theme; witness the final chapters of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby.* Martin du Gard implies that such an ending is by no means inevitable—that this too is only a literary tradition. He opposes the Horatian view of love to the Catullan.

May, 1930

My dear friend:

You have urged me very flatteringly to give you "something" for your readers. I was about to reply once more that everything that I have to say passes automatically into my *Thibaults,* when it occurred to me that I might copy out for you some pages from an old diary of mine. The subject is a conversation—a confidence, rather. It was told to me last summer on the steamer coming back from Africa. My companion spoke without any regard for literary or moral considerations and I set down his

story exactly as I heard it. Perhaps you will not find it as interesting a it seemed to me then. I wonder, too, whether you will see fit to offer you readers a narrative which I admit is likely to shock some good people Whatever may become of these pages, I shall have given you proof of my good will and constant sympathy.

But as I begin to copy them I see that they will hardly be intelligible without a few words of introduction.

Three years ago, in the course of an automobile trip in the Midi, I was obliged to make a detour and stop at Font-Romeu, where little Frantz H was finishing his cure. I decided to speak to his physician and find out on the spot if my pupil was really well and if he could safely return to Paris to continue his studies. I was pleased to find Frantz in excellent condition He was waiting impatiently for the day of his departure, and I arranged to spend a fortnight with him in order to take him on some excursions in the surrounding region—one of the most beautiful in all France.

There were not many guests at the *Pension des Roches*. Frantz introduced me to a youngish, dark-skinned man—an Italian—with a cordial expression and mild, absent-minded eyes. His name was—for your readers I shall call him Leandro Barbazano. He had been there for six months, at the bedside of his nephew—let us call him Michele Luzzati—a lad of sixteen who could no longer get up at all, so near was the end: indeed, he died before the end of my stay. Frantz spent a few minutes every morning and evening in Michele's room; he was the only person the doctor allowed to visit him. I myself had only one glimpse of Michele alive. I remember him better as he lay in death—no more than a skeleton, but with the beauty of a Persian prince. The window curtains were closed; no crucifix no candles; not even flowers: nothing that pertains to a funeral. In the dusk of the room, his profile was outlined on the white pillow with a chiseled perfection that would have seemed unearthly but for the smooth and gleaming skin of the face, in which there still remained an indefinable appearance of life and youth. The mute, animal intensity of the uncle's grief was agonizing to see. It surprised the professional attendants, who had been anticipating every day for five or six weeks the inevitable death of the boy.

Frantz's friendship with the nephew had brought me into daily contact with the uncle. People become acquainted quickly in health resorts I liked Barbazano's simple and straightforward character at once. He was the son of a bookseller in a large city of Northern Africa which I shall designate only by the letter *Y* (Oran, Algiers, Constantine, or Tunis, as you choose), and he was continuing his father's business in partnership with his brother-in-law Luzzati, the father of Michele. The Barbazano-Luzzati firm, he told me, was the leading book store of Y. Leandro himself was a little crude, being of common origin, but he had a sufficiently cultivated mind, thanks to his reading and travels. He had served his apprenticeship in book stores in France, Switzerland and Italy; he spoke several

nguages and was familiar with the main currents of European literature. his formed the subject of our first conversations. Later he began to talk o me about himself and his nephew. I had been touched from the first by ne maternal attentions which he lavished on Michele. I learned that he ad left his home and his business three years before to attempt this escue; he knew every little sanatorium in the Alps, the Jura, the Vosges; ll treatments, all climates had been tried—in vain. Although all the doc-ors agreed that the boy had been tuberculous to the marrow from infancy nd could never have been cured, Barbazano reproached himself for not aving attempted to save Michele's health sooner, and this unjustified re-norse was frequently the subject of frank talks between us, which did nore to bring us together than all our literary discussions.

I was with Leandro during the slow passing of Michele. Those three ays of waiting created a temporary but active bond of friendship between s. When the boy died I put my car at Barbazano's service for the neces-ary errands and formalities. Contrary to our expectations, Michele's body as not taken back to Africa: the Luzzatis wired Leandro to have their on buried in the little cemetery of Font-Romeu. I was struck by one etail: Barbazano had the watch, fountain pen, cuff links and other trinkets nat had belonged to his nephew put into the coffin with him; then he had is linen and all his clothes burned in the incinerator of the pension. He as capable of tenderness, but he was not sentimental.

Frantz and I accompanied Barbazano in the funeral procession as if e had been his oldest friends. The burial was soon over: the passage rom the hotel to the cemetery was brief, and there was no religious ervice. The next day we took Leandro to the station at Perpignan and, ouched to the heart, saw him leave for Marseilles with only a tourist's uitcase in his hand and not a single souvenir of the child he was leaving ehind him.

I resumed my trip north a few days later.

Barbazano wrote to me as soon as he had arrived in Africa. We xchanged two or three letters and a few cards; then our chance connection egan to lapse. However, I had word from him the next year. He re-inded me of a conversation we had had about the Fascist regime, re-eated his wish to become a French citizen, and asked for my assistance. did what I could for him, and a few months later he informed me that e had been naturalized.

Last summer when circumstances brought me to North Africa and to itself, I immediately thought of Barbazano. I let him know that I was oming. He met me at the wharf and greeted me in his usual fashion—demonstratively, but with a masculine cordiality that was altogether uthentic. He scarcely resembled the bowed, feverish, care-worn man om whom I had parted three years earlier at Perpignan. His pure Roman ce, precisely modeled in spite of a slight fleshiness, had a serene and appy expression. On seeing him again I was struck with his resemblance

to the death mask of little Michele, the extraordinary nobility of which I believe, will always remain in my memory.

During the six weeks I spent at Y, Leandro Barbazano put himself out in a thousand ways to remove all difficulties from my path and make my visit enjoyable. I even had a little trouble in declining some of his proposals. He wanted to introduce me to the various groups of local writers and even had the notion of having me give a lecture in the municipal theater. When I assured him that I was incapable of speaking in public and that I had absolutely no message to give to the people he wanted to assemble in my honor, I remember that he shrugged his shoulders and replied with a disarmingly authoritative air: "Come, now! You will do as your colleagues do. All the authors who come here give a lecture. The historians on history, the poets on poetry, the novelists on the novel. They talk about themselves, their works, their method of writing, their hobbies, their diet. And no matter how well they have taken care to stock the stores with their books, everything is sold out inside of a week." I nearly had to lose my temper and scowl at him for several days in order to escape this ritual exhibition.

But I am digressing. I will only add a word about the Barbazano-Luzzati book store. It was evidently one of the best in the city. Situated on one of the busiest corners, it was filled with customers all day long. At noon and at seven o'clock in the evening a clerk lowered the iron shutter across the front of the store, leaving only a low, empty doorway: the store then ceased to be a bookshop and became a little gathering-place where men of letters, teachers, journalists, and students met when their work was over; there for an hour the latest minor publications from Paris were passed religiously from hand to hand. I too should have come willingly to the room behind the store for a daily chat with Leandro; but he always wanted me to stay for lunch or dinner, and rather than share those noisy and overabundant family meals I preferred to eat at the cook-shops I chanced upon while strolling through the native quarter. For Leandro lived with his brother-in-law and his sister. He did not appear to mind it in the least, and this surprised me, for they seemed very different from him.

Ignazio Luzzati was a very old man, with round shoulders and a puffy Levantine face; but behind his steel-rimmed glasses gleamed a pair of steady, determined, and very watchful eyes. He sat all day, like a buddha, on a dais at the back of the shop; too fat to climb the ladder or even come and go through the galleries of books, he had erected this overseer's platform from which he conducted all sales by himself, calling out remarkably exact orders to the young Jewish and Italian clerks, who had been trained to obey him like hunting dogs.

The sister of Leandro had such a gracious name that I cannot bring myself to change it—all the more as it was her sole adornment. She was called Amalia. Although much younger than her husband (indeed, he seemed more like her father), she too had a decidedly oriental corpulence

ertainly she wasn't beautiful: I should even say that her creased turtle-
ke eyes, her fat face, her oily complexion and her pear-shaped body,
abby and distorted from pregnancies and nursing, were calculated to
ake her a sovereign remedy against concupiscence. I understood her ap-
earance better after seeing her gorge herself with a compote of figs
eeped in fresh cream and honey. In addition to the platefuls of macaroni
hich she consumed at meal times, she munched sweets from morning to
ight, and nearly always talked with her mouth full. Her cash drawer was
ll of stuffed pistachios, dates, loukoums, and the change was always
icky. In justice I must add that there was something passionate and im-
erious about her gluttony that took away most of its repugnance. This
oracity seemed to be the outlet, the last resort, of all a woman's ardor; it
as almost pathetic.

About her swarmed a half-dozen little Luzzatis of both sexes, from
fteen years old down to two, all fat and dumpy, with chubby cheeks and
ound bottoms, and flabby as frogs; they were afflicted with hoarse voices
nd thick mops of hair and were all unspeakably vulgar. The thought
hat they were the brothers and sisters of the admirable Michele did not
t first enter my mind; but when it finally dawned on me, the effect was
tupefying.

When I was first introduced to the Luzzatis I thought it proper to
ay a word about the son whom I had virtually seen die three years before.
He had long been doomed," sighed Mme. Luzzati. I was disagreeably im-
ressed by this conventional expression of sorrow. "Adipose tissue," I
eflected, "retards all activities and even paralyzes the most natural feel-
ngs." The mother's indifference surprised me all the more when I turned
o old Luzzati and saw that he was in tears. Thereafter I avoided mention-
ng Michele's name. But two or three times, perhaps, in the course of my
isits and the meals I was obliged to take with the Luzzatis, Leandro or I
eferred to our meeting at Font-Romeu, and each time the eyes of Papa
uzzati silently filled with tears. There could be no doubt that Michele had
een his father's favorite child.

I was recalled to France without having had an opportunity to go
rther south. In any case, the season (it was the beginning of August)
as unfavorable. To compensate for this, Barbazano offered to show me
me of the sites along the coast. We devoted the last week of my stay to
is excursion. Leandro was a well-informed guide, a sensible and con-
enial companion. I like these simple and candid people who are what they
re and have no false pretensions. Leandro had a practical mind, trained
y experience, direct and adaptable and free of all mysticism. His natural
od sense reminded me of a mountain stream, cold, a little rough, but
ear and lively. He was not obsessed by general ideas and he talked un-
gmatically, as a sincere man who had often had to change his opinions;
t on most questions he had sound views, formed by contact with facts
ther than by thumbing books. His conversation—and he spoke only when
e actually had something to say—was always refreshing. His presence

counted for a great deal in the happy memory which I have of that tou along the African shore.

Consequently, I was glad to learn on our return to Y that he had t go to Marseilles for a few days on business and that if I chose to wa for a later boat we could go together.

The crossing was ideal. Only a few passengers. Not a breath c wind, not an eddy in the water. When night fell, it was so mild and balm that we did not have the heart to go below and sleep in our cabin bu decided to wait for sunrise on deck, stretched out side by side in ou canvas chairs.

It was there in that incomparable isolation, that Leandro spoke t me for the first time about his past, in words which I have scrupulousl preserved and which I now copy down for you.

August 2

—Arrived at Marseilles yesterday morning. Said goodbye to Leandr after a last dinner together at the Vieux-Port. I, rather moved at leavin him. He, not at all: cordial, natural, as always, and perfectly matter-of-fac

Shall be in Paris this evening, but shan't reach Beleme until Friday Should like to take advantage of this railroad trip to set down the stor Leandro told me on deck that fine evening of the 21st.

Had exchanged desultory remarks about modern literature—the timi progress of psychology in the contemporary French novel, the boldness o certain German and English novelists, etc. He mentioned the article i the *Revue des deux Mondes* in which I was criticized for having dealt wit "questionable" subjects in my book—subjects which were deemed utterl "unlikely." He then made a vague remark, something like this, but in a unexpectedly irritated tone: "I don't know how people are made, Monsieu du Gard! Everything always seems unlikely to them. Isn't life made u almost entirely of unusual details?" The conversation dropped. Then h said, rather abruptly: "Look, Monsieur du Gard, this is the first time I'v ever felt like telling this to anyone . . . You have seen our life at the store— Amalia, old Luzzati, their swarm of children. At first sight what could b less unusual, you think. Well, who ever knows? . . . If I were sure wouldn't spoil this fine evening for you with my talk . . ."

My only response was to draw my deck chair up to his.

Now that I have decided (he said), I will tell you the whole thin crudely, just as it happened. But I must go back twenty years. An even farther, for the beginning. To our childhood.

We were brought up by our father—my sister and I. My mothe died when I was three: I don't remember her. Amalia, who is four yea older than I, was seven then. My father was extremely harsh and dom ineering. We didn't love him. You see—I warned you that I would b frank. He was the son of an Italian who had owned a magazine sho He himself had long since taken over this little business. He made mon

little by little and then opened this book store. He was almost illiterate. He had had a hard life. When he was married for the second time, to our mother, he was already aging. My sister and I never knew him except as an old man with a white goatee and decayed teeth and a hard skin that had gradually become lined with creases—just like a piece of wet parchment, you know, that has been left to shrivel in the sun. We never kissed him.

Very well. A little while after my mother died we moved to an old building at the entrance to the Jewish quarter. I must describe it to you because of what came later. It was at the corner of two streets. The book store on the ground floor was in a good location for selling. Behind it there was a back room and then a big kitchen which opened on a common court. From the back room you went up by a little winding staircase—I can see it still—to the room on the second floor. I remember only a little about that time. I slept in my father's bed and my sister on a mattress in a corner. Amalia was probably eight or nine years old. She took her role of big sister seriously. She looked after me—got me up in the morning, washed my face, took me to paddle in the gutter in the court, and I believe she used to slap me, with permission.

A little later—I was beginning to go to school, I was about eight and Amalia twelve—there was a considerable change in our lives. We stopped sleeping in the room on the second floor. Our father said that he had attacks of asthma at night and was waking us up. I believe this was true. But Amalia later pointed out to me that this recurrence of asthma had coincided with the arrival of a serving woman who had been hired to do the cooking and gradually began to keep house for us. Not that it matters. Business was not going badly. Father had money. He rented a room for my sister and me on the fourth floor, on the same level as the terrace. We reached it by the main stairway for tenants. It was bright and cool enough, with white marble flagstones and glazed tile on the lower walls. It was quite deep, for Father had been able to divide the back part of the room with a sort of low partition made out of planks and old packing-cases. This gave each of us a long, narrow cell shut off by a curtain: just enough room for a bed, a night table, and a chair. The washstand was in front of the window, in the undivided part of the room; my sister and I took turns using it.

It was there that we grew up. We were very free, you understand. There was no one to oversee us on our top floor. But we did not abuse this freedom. The difference in our ages seemed to fade away year by year. We got along with each other perfectly. All the more because we had to endure Father's ill-temper together, storming from morning to night down on the first floor.

That period passed quickly. I was twelve—fourteen—sixteen. When I think of it, it must seem strange to you, a girl of twenty sharing her bedroom with a brother of sixteen. But I assure you, Monsieur du Gard, it surprised no one there. In the first place we had always shared the

same room. And then that low partition between us gave us each a little nook of his own. And besides, in those days, families used to be crowded together any which way in those old tenements. Promiscuity like ours was quite commonplace.

Very well. Like all girls of her age, Amalia had a sweetheart. She was pretty enough, God knows. Her sweetheart was a boy of the neighborhood, an Italian like us, the son of a grain dealer. They would meet for five minutes at nightfall, at the corner of the alley behind the house, whenever my sister could find an excuse to go on an errand. Often too, thanks to me, they would meet on Sundays at the soccer match, when my sister was allowed to go with me. Amalia had no secrets from me. In our room in the evening, while we were undressing and long after we had gone to bed, we would talk endlessly about ourselves through the wooden partition. She would tell me about her handsome Stefano and how she was going to marry him as soon as he had done his army service. For my part, I didn't hesitate to enlighten her on my first schoolboy sprees and my little affairs with the girls of the neighborhood. We were really like two sworn friends. Don't imagine that I am telling you all this simply to rehearse old memories. It is necessary for a full understanding. Anyway, I am now coming to what I wanted to tell you.

Very well. I was seventeen years old. I had just taken my degree. That rather impressed my father. Nevertheless, he refused to let me continue my studies. He had put me to work in the store. But he did allow me to take a few courses at the University, so that I had more freedom than an ordinary clerk. I made good use of it. I was a healthy young fellow and God knows I was interested in women. I had a lot of little adventures in the neighborhood; but momentary adventures—love affairs of twenty minutes, without an aftermath. Sometimes on Saturdays when Amalia went upstairs to bed, she found the water jar placed in a certain way which meant: "Don't worry, I won't be in till midnight." But this didn't happen very often.

Then, that year at Easter, or perhaps Pentecost, the daughter of one of our neighbors, a tenant on the third floor, came home for a vacation. Her name was Ernestina. She was a swarthy little Italian, thin and wiry, a real alley-cat. She was two years younger than Amalia and so two years older than I. She had been our playmate in the old days and even as a child had drawn me into corners to kiss. But we hadn't seen her for several years; her mother had sent her away to work for an uncle who had an export business in the south. I realized on our first meeting that Ernestina had learned other things down there besides bookkeeping. The very day after her arrival she let me take her up to the terrace of our house. There was a little wooden shed there to pile the laundry in when it was dry. All told, it made a very satisfactory nook for a boy of seventeen and a girl of nineteen bent on having a good time together. Ernestina was evidently determined to make the most of her vacation and to have

me make the most of it with her. The only idea in our heads was to be together as much as possible. We had to invent ruses. Her mother kept her in in the evenings. Several times, when Amalia was at the cashier's desk in the store, I was able to take Ernestina to our room. But that wasn't enough. We were becoming more and more avid. We dreamed of having a whole night in each other's arms. It was she who found the way: the last day, I don't know how, she managed to make a false departure, and while her mother thought she was on the way to the train, she came in and hid in my room in order to spend the night there with me. I was to take her to the station at dawn.

Naturally we had to tell my sister, and that seemed perfectly simple to Ernestina. I remember saying to her: "Since you think it's so simple, settle it with Amalia yourself; I don't want to talk to her about it." My sister had known about our affair from the beginning. Just the same, I must admit it embarrassed me to bring my mistress to the room where my sister was sleeping and make love a few feet away from her. But we had talked freely about such things for years. Besides, I didn't know for sure what experience she herself had had; Ernestina said that Amalia knew as much as she did. And then, there was the famous partition. And above all, the desire I had for Ernestina did not leave much room for scruples . . . You see, I am telling you all this without embellishments.

To tell the truth, Amalia did not fall in with the scheme very gladly. I wasn't present when they discussed it, and Ernestina would tell me nothing; but all that day I could see from my sister's attitude that she was annoyed. Perhaps without entirely knowing why herself. I suppose that if she could have spent the night elsewhere she would have done so. I suppose. I am not absolutely sure; she may have been a little curious too.

It had been terribly hot that day. Ernestina had been in the room on the fourth floor since six o'clock in the evening, and I had gone up several times to kiss her and bring her something to eat. After dinner my father and Lucia sat out in front of the shop, as they often did, for a breath of air. Lucia was the housekeeper, who now lived with us. I sat down beside them so as not to give the impression of slipping away too soon. I wondered what had become of Amalia. Had she gone upstairs already? At dinner she had said she had a headache. By nine o'clock I was so impatient that I said good night and had the audacity to go off and leave the closing of the shutters to my father, contrary to all our habits. My father did not take such matters lightly.

Very well. I expected to find the two girls gossiping upstairs. Not at all. It was dark as night in the room and completely silent. I groped my way to my bed. Ernestina was there. She whispered to me: "Don't make any noise, Amalia is sleeping. She has a headache." Her breathing could be heard on the other side of the partition; she appeared to be asleep. But it was hardly nine o'clock, and her falling off to sleep seemed unnatural, after a day like that.

I admit I had something else to think of than Amalia's sleep, and

that both of us very soon forgot that she was so near us. At the end of a few minutes we had abandoned even the most elementary discretion. It was quite a night, Monsieur du Gard, and Ernestina had no reason to regret missing her train. . . .

It was necessary for her to leave the first thing in the morning. As soon as it was dawn we had to dress hastily and slip out of the house. Amalia was still asleep. Ernestina did not say goodbye to her.

She was still asleep, or pretending to be, when I returned from the station. It wasn't more than five o'clock. I was tired and went back to bed. Then I got up again as usual at seven. A little later Amalia also got up as usual. I heard her putting on her shoes behind the curtain as I washed myself. She said good morning as if nothing had happened. But when she came out of her alcove I could see from her appearance that she hadn't slept a wink. I had finished washing. As usual, I made room for her and then went down to open the shop. Not a word about Ernestina.

We didn't get along very well the next few days. There were spats over trifles; and instead of laughing in a moment, as we used to do, we would remain hostile and sulk at each other the rest of the day.

Amalia seemed determined to be disagreeable to me. She trumped up all sorts of grievances. Thus, she took it into her head to get up as soon as she heard me getting out of bed and monopolized the washstand before me. She said: "Turn about's fair play—I'm tired of pouring out your dirty water." It was absurd. There was no need for her to be downstairs before eight o'clock; whereas I had to have opened the shutters of the store by then and got the milk and bought the morning paper, if I didn't want to have a row with Father. He always had me read the paper aloud to him at breakfast. The first time, I let her have her way and went downstairs without washing. Very well. But the next day, when she started to do it again, I lost my temper. She was already in front of the basin in her slip and petticoat. When she saw me coming, she splashed water at me. I am purposely telling you this in detail. Sometimes we used to scuffle in fun, but this time I was in no mood for fooling. I caught her from behind, lifted her up on my knee and carried her to her bed. She was heavy and kicked about like a fiend. I had my hands on her breasts and her buttocks were squirming against me. All this is very clear in my memory: I have often relived that ridiculous scene; moreover, it was that morning, that moment, in that transit from washstand to bed, that it first dawned on me that my sister was a woman made like other women and even that she was infinitely more desirable than Ernestina. I threw her on her bed, cursing as if I were still furious with her. I remember that she suddenly ceased to struggle: I strode haughtily back to the washstand. I washed and dressed. When I left the room, she was still lying across the bed in the same position.

Very well. Let me go on. I had the habit of reading rather late at night. Amalia had never made any objection. Anyway, the partition separating us kept my little candle-end from bothering her. But she seemed

absolutely bent on upsetting my ways. Now she got the notion of making me put out the light, on the pretext she was tired and I was keeping her awake. Naturally, I refused. Then she climbed up very quietly on her chair and blew out the light by waving a petticoat over the partition with her outstretched arm. I relighted it immediately. She began again. I can still see her over the partition, her hair tumbling down and a look of malice in her eyes. I am sure that she detested me that night and sincerely wished me ill. Decidedly, Ernestina's vacation had spoiled a number of things.

The next evening I had taken care to protect the flame, and when I saw her ineffectually shaking her petticoat over the partition, I burst out laughing without interrupting my reading. I heard her lie down again. I thought that that childish prank was over. But not at all! I was reading peacefully: suddenly I saw her leap towards me and upset the candlestick with her hand. Then it all happened in a minute. I lost my head completely. In two seconds I was on my feet and had her around the waist. Just what did happen? I am trying to remember everything as distinctly as I can. It was dark. I was wild with fury. So was she. She was a husky girl. I tried to overcome her, to throw her on the floor, with the fixed intention of thrashing any desire for further tricks out of her. We were pressed together in the dark, both in our nightgowns, and struggling like two madmen. Finally I lifted her off her feet. She clutched the back of my neck with her fingernails. I inhaled that scent of flesh still warm from the bed—the same odor that I had breathed all one night on the body of Ernestina. With a sudden movement, I bent her over backwards on my mattress. In the same instant I found myself caught between her two bare legs, which she closed behind me. I swayed. I fell on her. There wasn't much left of my anger, I confess—just enough to sharpen my desire. I sought her lips, furiously. I believe that she was awkwardly holding them out. . . .

And there you are.

You see how naturally things like that can happen. It's very simple even, when you think about it and trace everything back step by step.

Well, it went on for four years. Four years. Even a little longer. And I am not ashamed to tell you, Monsieur du Gard: they were the four happiest years—the only really happy years—of my life!

Amalia was a virgin when I took her. But—what shall I say—her inexperience was . . . passionate. I was seventeen, and except for Ernestina I had had only lucky escapades, often enough without even a bed—between two doors, in the corner of a cellar, beneath the trees in a park, in the fields. I didn't know what a continuous, daily union was. It is incredible how much love is augmented by the habits that grow up between two bodies. And then, of course, we were both ardent and quite insatiable, as one is at that age. This wasn't all. Looking back, I believe I can distinguish still another thing. When a man and wife are on good terms and have lived together a long time and become utterly used to each other's nearness, they are united by a very deep feeling, a wordless, internal understanding

of which they are scarcely aware and which is quite indescribable. It is this that makes them a couple. Young people have no idea what it is like. Well, thanks to our seventeen years together, our intimacy of brother and sister, and to our having the same blood in our veins, we gained immediately that kind of secret understanding that settled couples have . . . But you will analyze all this much better than I can, Monsieur du Gard.

The strangest part is that no one around us ever suspected a thing. To be sure, we were careful to ward off suspicion. From time to time, on Saturday nights, I would ask my father for a little money to go and "shoot pool"; and the next day Amalia would tease me openly at the table for looking tired. For her part she broke off with the grain dealer's son and let herself be courted publicly by one of our neighbors, a rather stupid fellow who was satisfied to meet her occasionally in the street—just what was needed to create a little neighborhood gossip.

Well, it went on for four years. And no doubt it would have gone on still longer. But two things intervened about which we could do nothing.

The first was the approach of my military service. I had already taken a medical examination at the Italian consulate. At the end of the year I was to join a Sicilian regiment and spend two years in Italy. No way of getting out of it. I swear many a time I thought of deserting! If it hadn't been for my father, I might have done it. What a stupid trick that would have been!

The other thing came from my father. He was nearly seventy, and he had decided that Amalia should marry. Some time before, to better the business, he had hired a former bookseller from Naples, with age and experience, who was beginning to make our store one of the best places in the city. You have met him: it was Luzzati, my brother-in-law. He was about fifty years old then. He had saved up a pretty little nest-egg. And he had a passion for my sister, silent but stubborn and intense, like himself. Father thought it an excellent match: at one stroke he would assure his own future and that of his children. Luzzati was going to purchase half of the business and get the daughter of the house into the bargain; and he promised to accept me as partner when my term of service was over. Thanks to this arrangement, my father, who was getting old and more and more asthmatic, could retire and live on his income without waiting until I was old enough to manage the store.

There was only one obstacle: the attitude of Amalia. Oh, she did not dare say no to Father. But she was evasive and kept putting off her reply to gain time. From the day Luzzati entered the household she had taken a dislike to him. Between ourselves she called him "the old pig." She found him obsequious, repulsive. She heaped insults on him. She said to me: "I would rather kill myself."

Looking back, I have an unhappy memory of that year. It was the first time Father had encountered such opposition in his own family. You could see that he was boiling with suppressed anger. But I believe he

would have turned his daughter into the streets sooner than give up his plan. The months passed. Amalia held firm. In our room we forgot all that. Our passion was only intensified by those threats and by my approaching service. I was to embark at the beginning of October. Father's rage became terrible. He scarcely spoke at all to Amalia.

In the mountains towards the south, about a hundred kilometers away, there was a well-known vocational school in a sort of convent. It was managed by nuns; young girls were sent there for two or three years to learn all sorts of manual trades. Sometimes Father would speak of it significantly at the table while looking at Luzzati, who took his noon meal with us. One Sunday evening as Amalia started up to bed he followed her to the staircase and said, looking her full in the eyes: "If you don't consent by next Sunday I will take you to the vocational school, and you shall stay there as long as necessary." We knew very well that he would do as he said. You may object that Amalia was of age. But that was our way of life, Monsieur du Gard, and it never occurred to us that we could throw off our father's authority, no matter how old we were.

Amalia cried for several days. I did not know what to say to her. The thought of her marrying "the old pig" was as unbearable to me as it was to her. But the idea that we might be deprived of the three months we had left before my departure, was still more horrible. That was what decided her. She was heroic. She consented, but on the condition that the marriage should not take place before the end of the year and that until then Luzzati should not treat her as his fiancee or say a word to her about anything. Father was beside himself. But Luzzati accepted; he even seemed happy. Amalia told me: "It's all the same to me, I will kill myself as soon as you are gone." And she was capable of it, Monsieur du Gard. It made me sweat to think of it. Finally I overcame my repugnance and told her: "Accept him. I shall be back in two years, and we will go to France together." She didn't even answer me. I am sure I would never have convinced her. But suddenly she had an idea of her own. An entirely unexpected idea. "Yes, I will marry him; but only if you will arrange to make me pregnant before then." You see? Since there was no way out, she consented to sleep with Luzzati and to be his wife for two years, if she was sure of having a child by me and of not having one by him. Very well. We "arranged" matters, and sure enough two months later we knew what we wanted. I was satisfied. I knew now that Amalia would not commit suicide and that she would wait for me.

I am reaching the end of my story—or nearly. But what I have left to say is not very cheerful.

I left for Sicily in October and they were married.

Seven months later Amalia had a child. A boy. As you have already guessed, it was Michele. He was only just alive, as if he really had been born prematurely: in the first year alone they nearly lost him a dozen times.

During all that year Amalia wrote ardent letters to me in secret. In every one she talked about my coming home and our running away together. I thought of nothing else myself, but naturally I could only write to her about trivialities. And then, little by little . . . the tone of her letters changed. One day she announced that she was pregnant again. Only that. I was more surprised than jealous. Frankly, I was beginning to think less about her myself. You will understand that: to enter into a new life at twenty is an intoxicating experience; and besides, there were pretty girls in Sicily. Then her letters became fewer. Finally I had a telegram announcing my father's death. In a word, when my service was over and I came home, I found Amalia heavier and full of her own life, with her two children—Michele always pale and sickly, and Giustina, that fat girl you've seen, who never made any difficulties about living and already appeared to be the elder. The first few days Amalia avoided being alone with me, I believe. Before her husband she did not seem at all embarrassed to see me. I was the one who looked like a fool. Did she consider the past mere childishness? Or had she simply forgotten how she felt then? You will believe this or not, as you choose, Monsieur du Gard, *but there was never anything between us again.*

Anyway, I stayed with them only a short while that time. The store was doing very well. I wasn't needed there. I persuaded my brother-in-law that it would be a good thing to let me go and study the book trade in France. And so I left. I served a stage of apprenticeship in Marseilles, another in Lyon, another in Geneva, and a fourth in Paris. I was there when the war broke out.

I returned to Italy. I worked for another stage in a book store in Rome. But not long. The Italian mobilization compelled me to rejoin my regiment. Ten months later I was a second lieutenant. I went through a a lot. I don't say that to boast, I did no more than many another. But it helps to explain what happened afterwards.

When I found myself at home again in 1919, safe and sound, and home with them all at the Barbazano-Luzzati store—well, in spite of everything, Monsieur du Gard, life seemed pretty wonderful! My brother-in-law, who was feeling his age, gave me the heartiest welcome. Amalia, mother of a family now, seemed happy. I can see her as she was then. I can see the four children, sturdy and noisy and tumbling over each other from morning to night, around Michele's armchair. He would smile at them gently . . . Poor little fellow . . . Monsieur du Gard, telling this to you now, I should like to be able to say that it was solely because of him that I stayed there and settled down with them. And it is certainly true that I adored the child. But no, it wasn't because of him that I accepted their family life so easily. It was congenial to me. The past was far off and had no effect on me. The war had made a great break. My sister, Luzzati's wife, always pregnant or nursing a baby, with her fat little children and her old husband never reminded me—*has never since reminded me*—of the Amalia of my youth. That is the absolute truth.

And then, that store of ours had an attraction for me that no other ookshop could possibly have. Luzzati has always treated me as his em-loyer. You have seen him there: he keeps the selling end, all the dull outine work, for himself. He has let me do a little publishing. I started hat review. I built up those collections I showed you. I felt that I was appy. I was.

There was only one dark spot in that life—Michele's health. Even bout that I deceived myself for a long time. He was never really sick. would say to myself: "It's the heat, the climate . . . ." or else: "It's only phase—he'll grow out of it." I didn't see how he was fading away. I was urt, though, to see that Amalia obviously cared more for his brothers and isters. Oh, quite without thinking: it was simply that only the healthy nes were her true children. You imagine perhaps that Michele was a sort f living remorse for her, for the two of us? No. It might have been so. But it wasn't. I must confess one thing to you: it wasn't until very late hat I myself realized my guilt in the matter. Very late: at Font-Romeu, nd a little before . . . . Suddenly I told myself that I was responsible, fter all, for that birth, that sickness, that martyrdom. And yet—— Responsible? How can one know? As for my sister, I will swear she never hought of it. For her—without her realizing it, of course—Michele's leath was a relief. Yes. And at bottom, Monsieur du Gard, it was for me oo. In spite of the grief I felt, I am happy now. I am even more happy, nore tranquil, than before. We are all happy. All of us together.

This is the way it happened, and nothing can change it.

He stopped. And it all seemed so simple to me that night that I had othing to say.

* * * * *

(Here followed some notes of a professional nature, in case I might vant to use this story some time as literary material. I shall not copy hem all for you, my dear friend. I shall only set down these few lines n closing.)

. . . It would be necessary also to change the ending, as from the re-urn from Sicily; and above all not breathe a word of my recollections f the obese Amalia of forty, enthroned behind the cashier's desk in the nidst of her brats—or gobbling her honeyed figs—or letting her imposing reast flow out of her jacket to humor her last-born, a fat-cheeked urchin nearly two years old and still unweaned, who ate at the table with us and hen at the end of the meal greedily scrambled up into his mother's lap o suck a few gulps of stale milk by way of dessert.

CLARK MILLS:

Invocation III

We seek the absolute hallucination;
the sourceless voice; the fellowship of apparitions.
And voyage towards the virgin meadows of the sea
where, in the sea-light of our wake
and the white light of constellations, lucid
above our mast, the shore-lights and the buoys
fade and are lost.

Seek strength for recollection, strength
to lift the burden of our years of wandering;
the burden of the blaze of cities in the mind
and rooms and cries and evenings and conflagrations
gone down in shipwreck with far countries and far epochs;
the burden of the faces
that have no country but their species, and no home
except their home of horror and oblivion.

Unloosed amidst the cold white nebulae of the unsounded spirit,
deep in the longing of the blood that laps the bone
and in the jungles of communal living
we shall keep watch, and question

—till fire falls
and like dead stones that burst with leaves and water
we too are kindled to delight and insight. For in this
we are consoled, and are absolved, and rise
vertical from chaos.

R. P. BLACKMUR:

Una Vita Nuova

That crazy wretch got up
and donned seagoing clothes.
"Tomtit," says he, "tom tup,
how lately blooms the rose!"
So instinct runs away.

That tireless fag went out,
the sea was spattered sun.
"Such goodness full about
and I am overrun."
So instinct skims away.

That hireling in arrear
sat down to ease his legs.
"I wear man's tiring-gear,"
cries he, "and nothing begs."
So instinct pours away.

That tired miser fished,
his livelong self as bait.
"I've caught before I wished
the flounder in heaven's strait."
So instinct scales away.

He turned, all flounder-faint,
in hope of human eyes.
"All beggar, all complaint,
all pierced I am," he cries;
all instinct skun away.

ELLEN TIFFT:

Old Man Mose Has Kicked the Bucket

Right exactly there on the sharpest roof-edge the
Rooster-comb sliced the air: the pure green
Three-grooved handle was sensitive to touch;
Was, against the flat agnostic gray,
A naked admission of the coming of spring.
Flo, the young girl with her elbows raised,
Gazed at her body in the mirror
In spite of the fact that the gray hairs thickened on
The chest of the dead man next door. The Elk's wreath
Was wound tightly around his conventional head.
Flo saw her image room-deep in the
Shallow pool of the mirror;
Dreamed of resistance slowly overcome.

S. RAIZISS:

Sunsets

The river talked all day with passionate purpose
Suing the unsusceptive shore;
In a drowse now against her pallor
He says no more.

Discursive winds had argument with leaves
And held the seaconch to human ears;
They move to alcoves behind the skies
Where nothing hears.

Daybirds make issue of this half hour
Deciding secret citadels;
The swallows swing to the sand marsh;
And no one tells.

The dryad shadows yawn before their homes
Committed to these mortal causes,
Slowly stretch extreme limbs
In lonely pauses.

Shadows down the setting face of men
Prolong before the last sun.
And silence closes over years as though
There had been none.

KENNETH BURKE:

Motives and Motifs in the Poetry of Marianne Moore

In this essay we would characterize the substance of Miss Moore's work as a specific poetic strategy. And we would watch it for insights which the contemplation of it may give us into the ways of poetic and linguistic action generally. For this purpose we shall use both her recently published book, *What Are Years,* and her *Selected Poems,* published in 1935 with an introduction by T. S. Eliot (and including some work reprinted from an earlier volume, *Observations*).

On page 8 of the new book, Miss Moore writes:

> The power of the visible
> is the invisible;

and in keeping with the pattern, when recalling her former title, *Observations,* we might even have been justified in reading it as a deceptively technical synonym for "visions." One observes the visibles — but of the corresponding invisibles, one must be visionary. And while dealing much in things that can be empirically here, the poet reminds us that they may

> dramatize a
> meaning always missed
> by the externalist.

It is, then, a relation between external and internal, or visible and invisible, or background and personality, that her poems characteristically establish. Though her names for things are representative of attitudes, we could not say that the method is Symbolist. The objects exist too fully in their own right for us to treat them merely as objective words for subjects. T. S. Eliot says that her poetry "might be classified as 'descriptive' rather than 'lyrical' or 'dramatic.'" He cites an early poem that "suggests a slight influence of H. D., certainly of H. D. rather than of any other 'Imagist.'" And though asserting that "Miss Moore has no immediate poetic derivations," he seems to locate her work in the general vicinity of imagism, as when he writes:

> The aim of 'imagism,' so far as I understand it, or so far as it had any, was to introduce a peculiar concentration upon something visual, and to set in motion an expanding succession of concentric feelings. Some of Miss Moore's poems — for instance with animal or bird subjects — have a very good spread of association.

I think of William Carlos Williams. For though Williams differs much from Miss Moore in temperament and method, there is an important quality common to their modes of perception. It is what Williams has chosen to call by the trade name of "objectivist."

Symbolism, imagism, and objectivism would obviously merge into one another, since they are recipes all having the same ingredients but in different proportions. In symbolism, the subject is much stronger than the object as an organizing motive. That is, it is *what the images are symbolic of* that shapes their treatment. In imagism, there would ideally be an equality of the two motives, the subjective and objective. But in objectivism, though an object may be chosen for treatment because of its symbolic or subjective reference, once it has been chosen it is to be studied in its own right.

A man might become an electrician, for instance, because of some deep response to electricity as a symbol of power. Yet, once he had become an electrician and thus had converted his response to this subject into an objective knowledge of its laws and properties, he would thereafter treat electricity as he did, not because each of his acts as an electrician would be symbolic like his original choice of occupation, but because such acts were required by the peculiar nature of electricity. Similarly, a poet writing in an "objectivist" idiom might select his subject because of some secret reference or personal significance it has had for him; yet having selected it, he would find that its corresponding object had qualities to be featured and appraised for themselves. And he might pay so much attention to such appraisal that the treatment of the object would in effect "transcend" the motive behind its original singling-out.

Thus, the poem "Four Quartz Crystal Clocks" (in *What Are Years*) begins:

> There are four vibrators, the world's exactest clocks;
> and these quartz time-pieces that tell
> time intervals to other clocks,
> these worksless clocks work well;
> and all four, independently the
> same, are there in the cool Bell
> Laboratory time
>
> vault. Checked by a comparator with Arlington
> they punctualize . . . (Etc.)

I think there would be no use in looking for "symbolist" or "imagist" motives behind the reference to the fact that precisely *four* clocks are mentioned here. It is an "objectivist" observation. We read of four, not because the number corresponds, for instance, to the Horsemen of the Apocalypse, but simply because there actually are four of them in the time vault. Similarly, "cool Bell Laboratory time vault" might have outlying suggestions of something like the coolness of a tomb—but primarily one feels that the description is there for purposes of objective statement; and had the nature of the scene itself dictated it, we should be reading of a "hot Bell Laboratory time tower." Though not journalism, it is reporting.

Yet any reader of Miss Moore's verse will quickly acknowledge that this theme, which provides an "objective" opportunity for the insertion of transitions between such words as "exactest," "punctualize," "careful timing," "clear ice," "instruments of truth," and "accuracy," is quite repre-

entative of her (and thus "symbolic" in the proportions of imagism). And the secondary level of the theme (its quality as being not the theme of clocks that tell the time, but of clocks that tell the time to clocks that tell the time)—I should consider thoroughly symbolic, as signalizing a concern not merely for the withinness of motives, but for the withinness-of-withinness of motives, the motives behind motives.[1]

We can call Miss Moore "objectivist," then, only by taking away the epithet in part. For though many details in her work seem to get there purely out of her attempt to report and judge of a thing's intrinsic qualities, to make us feel its properties as accurately as possible, the fact remains that, after you have read several of her poems, you begin to discern a strict principle of selection motivating her appraisals.

In *Selected Poems,* for instance, consider the poem, "People's Surroundings," that gives us a catalogue of correspondence between various kinds of agents and the scenes related to their roles. The poet is concerned to feature, in a background, the details that are an objective portrait of the person to whose kind of action this background belongs. "A setting must not have the air of being one"—a proscription one can observe if he makes the setting the extension of those in it. Here are relationships among act, scene, and agent (I use the three terms central to the philosophy of drama embodied in Henry James's prefaces). And

1. In passing we might consider a whole series of literary ways from this point of view. Allegory would deal with correspondences on a purely dogmatic, or conceptual basis. In the article on "Vestments," for instance, in the *Encyclopedia Britannica,* we read of various "symbolical interpretations": "(1) the *moralizing school,* the oldest, by which—as in the case of St. Jerome's treatment of the Jewish vestments—the vestments are explained as typical of the virtues proper to those who wear them; (2) the *Christological school, i. e.* that which considered the minister as the representative of Christ and his garments as typical of some aspects of Christ's person or office—*e. g.* the stole is his obedience and servitude for our sakes; (3) the *allegorical school,* which treats the priest as a warrior or champion, who puts on the amice as a helmet, the alb as a breastplate, and so on." A work constructed about the systematic use of any such theories of correspondence would, to our way of thinking, be allegorical. The symbolic would use an objective vocabulary for its suggestion of the subjective, with the subjective motive being organizationally more important than the objective one. The specific literary movement called Symbolism would exemplify this stress to a large extent, but would also gravitate towards Surrealism, which stresses the incongruous and contradictory nature of motives by the use of gargoyles as motifs. Imagism would be "personalistic," in the idealistic sense, in using scenic material as the reflection, or extension of human characters. The "objectivist," though rooted in symbolic and imagist concerns, would move into a plane where the object, originally selected by reason of its subjective reference, is studied in its own right. (The result will be "descriptive" poetry. And it will be "scientific" in the sense that, whereas poetry is a kind of act, the descriptiveness of science is rather the *preparation* for an act, the delayed action of a Hamletic reconnaissance in search of the accurate knowledge necessary for the act. And descriptive poetry falls across the two categories in than it acts by describing the scene preparatory to an act.) Naturalism has a greater stress upon the scenic from the polemic or depreciatory point of view (its quasi-scientific quality as delayed action, or preparation for action, often being revealed in that such literature generally either calls for action in the non-esthetic field or makes one very conscious of the fact that a "solution" is needed but is not being offered). True realism is difficult for us to conceive of, after so long a stretch of monetary idealism (accentuated as surrealism) and its counterpart, technological materialism (accentuated as behaviorism and operationalism), while pragmatic philosophies stress *making* and *doing* and *getting* in a localized way that obscures the realistic stress upon the *act.* The German term, *Realpolitik,* for instance, exemplifies a crude brand of pragmatism that completely misrepresents the realistic motive. The communicative nature of art gives all art a realistic ingredient, but the esthetic philosophies which the modern artist consciously or unconsciously absorbs continually serve to obscure this ingredient rather than to cultivate it.

among these people who move "in their respective places," we read of

> . . . the acacia-like lady shivering at the touch of a hand,
> lost in a small collision of orchids —
> dyed quicksilver let fall
> to disappear like an obedient chameleon in fifty shades of mauve
> and amethyst.

Here, with person and ground merged as indistinguishably as in a pointillist painting by Seurat, the items objectify a tentative mood we encounter throughout Miss Moore's verses. The lines are like a miniature impression of her work in its entirety. And when, contemplating a game of bowls, she writes, "I learn that we are precisians, not citizens of Pompeii arrested in action / as a cross-section of one's correspondence would seem to imply," she here "learns" what she is forever learning, in her contemplation of animals and natural and fabricated things, as she seeks to isolate, for her appreciation and our own, the "great amount of poetry in unconscious fastidiousness."

I think appreciation is as strong a motive in her work as it was in the work of Henry James. "The thing is to lodge somewhere at the heart of one's complexity an irrepressible *appreciation*," he says in his preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*. And: "To criticise is to appreciate, to appropriate, to take intellectual possession, to establish in fine a relation with the criticised thing and make it one's own." It is a kind of private property available to everyone — and is perhaps the closest secular equivalent to the religious motive of glorification. It is a form of gratitude. And following out its possibilities, where one might otherwise be querulous he can instead choose to be precise. This redemption or transformation of complaint is, I think, essential to the quality of perception in Miss Moore's verse. (Rather, it is an anticipation of complaint: getting there first, it takes up all the room.)

In "Spenser's Ireland" (*What Are Years*), we may glimpse somewhat how this redemption can take place. Beginning in a mood of appreciation almost studious, the poem ends

> The Irish say your trouble is their
> trouble and your
> joy their joy? I wish
> I could believe it;
> I am troubled, I'm dissat-
> isfied, I'm Irish.

Since it is towards this end that the poem is directed, we may assume that from this end it derives the logic of its progression.

Note the general tenor of the other observations: on family, on marriage, on independence and yielding, on the freedom of those "made captive by supreme belief." There is talk of enchantments, of transformations, of a coat "like Venus' mantle lined with stars . . . the sleeves new from disuse," of such discriminations as we get

> when large dainty
> fingers tremblingly divide the wings
> of the fly.

And there are lines naming birds, and having a verbal music most lovely in its flutter of internal rhymes:

> the guillemot
> so neat and the hen
> of the heath and the
> linnet spinet-sweet.

All these details could be thought of as contextual to the poem's ending (for, if you single out one moment of a poem, all the other moments automatically become its context). If, then, we think of the final assertion as the act, we may think of the preceding contextual material as the scene, or background, of this act (a background that somehow contains the same quality as the act, saying implicitly what the act of the final assertion says explicitly). Viewed thus we see, as the underlying structure of this "description," a poem that, if treated as a lyric, would have somewhat the following argument: "Surrounded with details appropriate to my present mood, with a background of such items as go with matters to do with family, union, independence, I, an Irish girl (while the birds are about — and sweetly) am dissatisfied."

I won't insist that I'm not wrong. But in any case, that's the way I read it. And I would discern, behind her "objectivist" study and editorializing, what are essentially the lineaments of a lyric. But where the lyrist might set about to write, "In the moonlight, by the river, on a night like this in Spain," I can think of Miss Moore's distributing these items (discreetly and discretely) among conversational observations about the quality of light in general and moonlight in particular, about rivers mighty and tiny, in mountains, across plains, and emptying into the desert or the sea, about the various qualifications that apply to the transformation from twilight to darkness, in suburbs, or over bays, etc.; and from travel books of Spain we might get some bits that, pieced together, gave us all into which, in her opinion, the given night in Spain should be "broken down."

We might try from another angle by suggesting that Miss Moore makes "because" look like "and." That is, the orthodox lyrist might say, in effect, "I am sad *because* the birds are singing thus." A translation into Miss Moore's objectivist idiom would say in effect: "There are such and such birds — *and* birds sing thus and so — *and* I am sad." The scenic material would presumably be chosen because of its quality as objective replica of the subjective (as observed moments in the scene that correspond to observing moments in the agent). But even where they had been selected because of their bearing upon the plaint, her subsequent attention to them, with appreciation as a motive, would transform the result from a purely psychologistic rhetoric (the traditional romantic device of simply using scenic terms as a vocabulary for the sympathetic naming of personal moods). And the result would be, instead, an appraisal or judgment of many things in and for themselves. They would be encouraged to disclose their traits, not simply that they might exist through the vicarage of words, but that they might reveal their properties as workmanship (workmanship being a trait in which the ethical and the esthetic are one).

What are years? That is, if we were to assemble a thesaurus of all the important qualifications of the term "years" as Miss Moore uses it, what would these qualifications be? I suppose a title is always an assertion because it is a thing — and every thing is positive. Years, we learn by her opening poem of that title, are at least a quality of observation (vision), involving the obligation of courage, of commands laid upon the self to be strong, to see deep and be glad. And years possess the quality of one

> ...who
> accedes to mortality
> and in his imprisonment, rises
> upon himself as
> the sea in a chasm...

Who does this, we are told, "sees deep and is glad." Years are also, by the nature of the case, steps from something to something. And to indicate a curve of development from the earlier volume, we might recall this same theme (of the rising water) as it was treated previously. I refer to a poem, "Sojourn in the Whale," which, beginning on the theme, "Trying to open locked doors with a sword," had likewise talked of Ireland. It is addressed to "you," a "you" who has heard men say: "she will become wise and will be forced to give / in. Compelled by experience, she / will turn back; water seeks its own level." Whereat

> ...you
> have smiled. 'Water in motion is far
> from level.' You have seen it, when obstacles happened to bar
> the path, rise automatically.

In the earlier poem, the figure was used defensively, even oppositionally. It is a tactic not common in Miss Moore's verse; as against the dialectician's morality of eristic, she shows a more feminine preference for the sheer ostracizing of the enemy, refuting by silence — disagreement implying the respect of intimacy, as in her poem on "Marriage," wittily appraising the "fight to be affectionate," she quotes, "No truth can be fully known until it has been tried by the tooth of disputation."

(When Miss Moore was editor of *The Dial,* her ideal number, as regards the reviews and articles of criticism, would I think have been one in which all good books got long favorable reviews, all middling books got short favorable reviews, and all books deserving of attack were allowed to go without mention. One can imagine how such a norm could be reached either charitably, through stress upon appreciation as motive, or not so charitably, by way of punishment, as when Miss Moore observes in "Spenser's Ireland": "Denunciations do not affect the culprit; nor blows, but it / is torture to him not to be spoken to." We need not decide between these motives in all cases, since they can comfortably work in unison.)

In contrast with the "oppositional" context qualifying the figure of the rising water in the earlier poem, "Sojourn in the Whale," its later variant has a context almost exaltedly positive. And repeating the same pattern (of affirmation in imprisonment) in another figure, the later poem widens the connotations of the years thus:

...The very bird
grown taller as he sings, steels
his form straight up. Though he is captive
his mighty singing
says satisfaction is a lowly
thing, how pure a thing is joy.
This is mortality,
this is eternity.

The pattern appears more conversationally (*What Are Years*, p. 12) in the suggestion that it must have been a "humorous" workman who made

this greenish Waterford
glass weight with the summit curled down toward
itself as the
grass grew,

and in "The Monkey Puzzle" (*Selected Poems*) we read

its tail superimposed upon itself in a complacent half spiral,
incidentally so witty.

Still, then, trying to discover what are years (or rather, what all are years), we might also recall, in *Selected Poems*, the poem on "The Fish," where the one fish featured as representative of its tribe is observed "opening and shutting itself like / an / injured fan"—in quality not unlike "The Student" of *What Are Years* who

...is too reclusive for
some things to seem to touch
him, not because he
has no feeling but because he has so much.

As the poem of "The Fish" develops, we might say that the theme is transferred "from the organism to the environment"; for we next read of a chasm through which the water has driven a wedge — and injury is here too, since

All
external
marks of abuse are present on this
defiant edifice. —

And finally

Repeated
evidence has proved that it can live
on what cannot revive
its youth. The sea grows old in it.

A chasm in the sea, then, becomes rather the sea in a chasm. And this notable reversal, that takes place in the areas of the "submerged," would also seem to be an aspect of "years." Which would mean that "years" subsume the synecdochic possibilities whereby those elements that cluster together can represent one another: here the active can become passive, the environed can become the environment, the container can be interchangeable with the contained. In possessing such attributes, "years" are poetry.

We may at this point recall our beginning — the citation concerning visible and invisible. In "The Plumet Basilisk" (*Selected Poems*) we read of this particular lizard that, "king with king,"

He leaps and meets his
likeness in the stream.

He is (in the poem it is a quotation)

> 'the ruler of Rivers, Lakes, and Seas,
> invisible or visible'—

and as scene appropriate to the agent, this basilisk is said to live in a basil ica. (Another lizard, in the same poem, is said to be "conferring wings o what it grasps, as the airplant does"; and in "The Jerboa," we are tol of "this small desert rat" that it "honours the sand by assuming it colour.") Likewise

> the plumet portrays
> mythology's wish
> to be interchangeably man and fish.

What I am trying to do, in reaching out for these various associations is to get some comprehensive glimpse of the ways in which the one per vasive quality of motivation is modified and ramified. I am trying, i necessarily tenuous material, to indicate how the avowed relation betwee the visible and the invisible finds variants, or sophistications, in "objec tivist" appreciation; how this appreciation, in an age of much querulous ness, serves rather to transcend the querulous (*Selected Poems*, p. 34: "The staff, the bag, the feigned inconsequence / of manner, best bespeak that weapon, self-protectiveness"); and how this same pattern takes form i the theme of submergence, with its interchangeabilities, and so in the theme of water rising on itself. At another point the motive takes as its object the motif of the spinster ("You have been compelled by hags to spin / gold thread from straw," with incidental suggestions of esthetic alchemy lines that appear in "Sojourn in the Whale," and so link with submergence Ireland, and the theme of spirited feminine independence, thus relating to kindred subjects in the later poem, "Spenser's Ireland"). I have also suggested that a like quality of imagination is to be found in the intellec tual ways of one who selects as his subject not clocks, but clocks for clocks (To appreciate just what goes on here, one might contrast these contem plative clocks — serene in their role as the motives behind motives — with the ominous clock-faces of Verhaeren, or in the grotesque plays of Ed mund Wilson, which no one seems to have read but me.) From these crystal clocks, I could then advance to another variant, as revealed in the treatment of ice and glass. These would, I think, be animated by the same spirit. See for instance (in *Selected Poems*) the study of the glacie as "an octopus of ice":

> this fossil flower concise without a shiver,
> intact when it is cut,
> damned for its sacrosanct remoteness.

"Relentless accuracy is the nature of this octopus / with its capacity fo fact"— which would make it a glacier with an objectivist esthetic. An two levels of motive are figured in the splendid concluding vista of

> . . . the hard mountain 'planed by ice and polished by the wind'—
> the white volcano with no weather side;

the lightning flashing at its base,
rain falling in the valleys, and snow falling on the peak—.[1]

We might have managed more easily by simply demarcating several themes, like naming the different ingredients that go to make up a dish. Or as with the planks that are brought together, to make a campaign platform, regardless of their fit with one another. But the relation among the themes of a genuine poetry is not of this sort. It is *substantial* — which is to say that all the branches spread from a single trunk.

I am trying to suggest that, without this initial substantiality, "objectivism" would lead not to the "feigned inconsequence of manner" that Miss Moore has mastered, but to inconsequence pure and simple. But because of this substantiality, the surfaces are derived from depth; indeed, the strict lawfulness in their choice of surfaces is depth. And the objects treated have the property not simply of things, but of volitions. They derive their poignancy as motifs from their relation to the sources of motive. And the relation between observer and observed is not that of news and reporter, but of "conversities" (her word).

In the earlier volume there is a poem, "Black Earth," wherein surprisingly the poet establishes so close an identification with her theme as not merely to "observe" it with sympathy and appreciation, but to speak for it. This is one of her rare "I" poems — and in it the elephant sometimes speaks with the challenge and confidence of an Invictus. Beginning on the theme of emergence (coupled with delight in the thought of submergence at will), there is first a celebration of the sturdy skin; then talk of power ("my back is full of the history of power"); and then: "My soul shall never be cut into / by a wooden spear." Next comes mention of the trunk, and of poise. And interwoven with the vigor of assertion, the focal theme is there likewise:

that tree-trunk without
roots, accustomed to shout
its own thoughts to itself...

1. This is cited from the poem that follows the one on "Marriage," and is in turn followed by "Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns." The three could be taken together as a triptych that superbly illustrates three stages in the development of one idea. First, we have the subtly averse poem on marriage (done in a spirit of high comedy that portrays marital quarrelings as interrelated somewhat like the steps of a minuet). Then comes the precise yet exalted contemplation of the glacier. And finally a discussion of the unicorn, a legendary solitaire:

Thus this strange animal with its miraculous elusiveness,
has come to be unique,
'impossible to take alive',
tamed only by a lady inoffensive like itself—
as curiously wild and gentle.

And typically, she cites of it that, since lions and unicorns are arch enemies, and "where the one is the other cannot be missing," Sir John Hawkins deduced an abundance of lions in Florida from the presence of unicorns there.

The theme of the lightning that flashes at the base of the glacier is varied in the unicorn poem (in a reference to "the dogs / which are dismayed by the chain lightning / playing at them from its horn"). And it is varied also in a poem on the elephant (still to be discussed) that

has looked at the electricity and at the earth-
quake and is still
here; . . .

and:

> ... The I of each is to
> the I of each
> a kind of fretful speech
> which sets a limit on itself; the elephant is
> black earth preceded by a tendril?

I think we can make a point by recalling this earlier poem when, in "Smooth Gnarled Crape Myrtle" (*What Are Years*), the theme of the elephant's trunk appears again, this time but in passing, contextual and "tangential" to the themes of birds, union, loneliness:

> ... 'joined in
> friendship, crowned by love.'
> An aspect may deceive; as the
> elephant's columbine-tubed trunk
> held waveringly out —
> an at will heavy thing — is
> delicate.

Surely, "an at will heavy thing" is a remarkable find. But one does not make such observation by merely looking at an elephant's trunk. There must have been much to discard. In this instance, we can know something about the omissions, quite as though we had inspected earlier drafts of the poem with their record of revisions. For though a usage in any given poem is a finished thing, and thus brilliant with surface, it becomes in effect but "work in progress" when we align it with kindred usages (emergent, fully developed, or retrospectively condensed) in other poems. And here, by referring to "Black Earth," we can find what lies behind the reference to the elephant's trunk in "Smooth Gnarled Crape Myrtle." We can know it for a fact what kind of connotations must, for the poet, have been implicit in the second, condensed usage. Hence we can appreciate the motives that enabled this trunk to be seen not merely as a *thing*, but as an *act*, representative of the assertion in "Black Earth." And by reviewing the earlier usage we can know the kind of volitional material which, implicit in the later usage, led beyond the perception of the trunk as a thing to this perception of it as an act. At such moments, I should say, out of our idealistic trammels we get a glimpse of realism in its purity. For as materialism is a stress upon the scene, idealism a stress upon the agent, mysticism a stress upon the purpose, and pragmatism a stress upon the means or agency, so realism is complete when it enables us to see in terms of the act.

Or let us look at another instance. Sensitivity in the selection of words resides in the ability, or necessity, to feel behind the given word a history — not a past history, but a future one. Within the word, collapsed into its simultaneous oneness, there is implicit a sequence, a complexity of possible narratives that could be drawn from it. If you would remember what words are in this respect, and how in the simultaneity of a word histories are implicit, recall the old pleasantry of asking someone, "What's an accordion," whereat invariably as he explains he will start pumping at bellows.

Well, among Miss Moore's many poems enunciating aspects of her

esthetic credo, or commenting on literary doctrines and methods, there is one, "To a Snail," beginning:

> If 'compression is the first grace of style',
> you have it. Contractility is a virtue
> as modesty is a virtue.

And this equating of an esthetic value with a moral one is summed up by locating the principle of style "in the curious phenomenon of your occipital horn."

In her poem on the butterfly (*What Are Years*, p. 17), the mood of tentativeness that had been compressed within the term "contractility" reveals its significant narrative equivalents. As befits the tentative, or contractile, it is a poem of jeopardy, tracing a tenuous relationship between a butterfly ("half deity half worm," "last of the elves") and a nymph ("dressed in Wedgwood blue"), with light winds (even a "zephyr") to figure the motives of passion. Were not the course of a butterfly so intrinsically akin to the "inconsequential ease" and "droverlike tenacity" of Miss Moore's own versa-tilities, one might not have much hope for a poem built about this theme (reminiscent of many musical Papillons—perhaps more than a theme, perhaps a set idiom, almost a form). Here, with the minute accuracy of sheerly "objectivist" description, there is a subtle dialectic of giving and receiving, of fascinations and releases—an interchange of delicately shaded attitudes. In this realm, things reached for will evade, but will follow the hand as it recedes.

Through the tracery of flight, there are two striking moments of stasis, each the termination of a course: one when "the butterfly's tobacco-brown unglazed / china eyes and furry countenance confront / the nymph's large eyes"— and the second when, having broken contact with the nymph's "controlled agitated glance," the "fiery tiger-horse" (at rest, but poised against the wind, "chest arching / bravely out") is motivated purely by relation to the zephyr alone. The poem concludes by observing that this "talk" between the animal and the zephyr "was as strange as my grandmother's muff."

I have called it a poem of jeopardy. (When butterfly and nymph confront each other, "It is Goya's scene of the tame magpie faced / by crouching cats.") It is also a poem of coquetry (perhaps our last poem of coquetry, quite as this butterfly was the last of the elves — coquetry now usually being understood as something that comes down like a ton of brick).[1]

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1. In the earlier volume there is an epigram-like poem, "To a Steam Roller," that I have always thought very entertaining. It excoriates this sorry, ungainly mechanism as a bungling kind of fellow that, when confronting such discriminations as are the vital purpose of Miss Moore's lines, would "crush all the particles down / into close conformity, and then walk back and forth / on them." We also read there:

> As for butterflies, I can hardly conceive
> of one's attending upon you, but to question
> the congruence of the complement is vain, if it exists.

Heretofore I had been content to think of this reference to a butterfly simply as a

The tentativeness, contractility, acquires more purely the theme of jeopardy in "Bird-Witted" (*What Are Years*), reciting the incident of the "three large fledgling mocking-birds," awaiting "their no longer larger mother," while there approaches

the
intellectual cautious-
ly c r e e p ing cat.

If her animals are selected for their "fastidiousness," their fastidiousness itself is an aspect of contractility, of jeopardy. "The Pangolin" (*What Are Years*), a poem which takes us through odd nocturnal journeys to the joyous saluting of the dawn, begins: "Another armoured animal"—and of a sudden you realize that Miss Moore's recondite menagerie is almost a thesaurus of protectivenesses. Thus also, the poem in which occur the lines anent visible and invisible, has as its conclusion:

unsolicitude having swallowed up
all giant birds but an
alert gargantuan
little-winged, magnificently
speedy running-bird. This one
remaining rebel
is the sparrow-camel.

The tentativeness also manifests itself at times in a cult of rarity, a collector's or antiquarian interest in the present, a kind of stylistic tourism. And it may lead to a sheer word play, of graduated sort (a Laforguian delight in showing how the pedantries can be reclaimed for poetry):

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device for suggesting weight by a contrasting image of lightness. But the role of butterfly as elf conversant to nymph might also suggest the presence of such overtones as contrasting types of masculinity. (This would give us a perfect instance of what Coleridge meant by fancy, which occurs when we discern behind the contrast an element that the contrasted images share in common.)

As for the later poem, where the theme of the butterfly is fully developed, I might now try to make more clearly the point I had in mind with reference to the two moments of stasis. In the opening words ("half deity half worm" and "We all, infant and adult, have / stopped to watch the butterfly") the poem clearly suggests the possibility that it will figure two levels of motivation, a deity being in a different realm of motives than a worm, and the child's quality of perception being critically distinct from the adult's. Examining the two moments of stasis, we find here too the indications of an important difference between them. At the first stasis, elf and nymph confront each other, while "all's a-quiver with significance." But at the final stasis, the conversity is between butterfly and west wind, a directer colloquy (its greater inwardness linking it, in my opinion, with the motive-behind-motive figuration in the theme of clocks-for-clocks). At this second stage, the butterfly is called "historic metamorphoser / and saintly animal"; hence we may take it that the "deity" level of motives prevails at this second stage. The quality of the image in the closing line ("their talk was as strange as my grandmother's muff") would suggest that the deified level is equated with the quality of perception as a child. (The grandmother theme also appears in "Spenser's Ireland," where we are told that "Hindered characters . . . in Irish stories . . . all have grandmothers." Another reason for believing that the second stage of the butterfly poem is also the "motives-behind-motives" stage is offered tenuously by this tie-up with the word "hindered," since the final poem in the book, as we shall know when we come to it, does well by this word in proclaiming a morality of art.)

Another poem, "Virginia Britannia" (*What Are Years*), that seems on the surface almost exclusively descriptive (though there is passing reference to a "fritillary" that "zigzags") is found to be progressing through scenic details to a similar transcendence. At the last, against sunset, two levels are figured, while the intermediate trees "become with lost identity, part of the ground." The clouds, thus marked off, are then heralded in words suggestive of Wordworth's ode as "to the child an intimation of / what glory is."

The lemur-student can see
that the aye-aye is not

an angwan-tíbo, potto, or loris.

et mention of the "aepyornis" may suggest the answer we might have iven, were we up on such matters, to one who, pencil in hand and with ıe newspaper folded to make it firmer, had asked, "What's a gigantic ird, found fossil in Madagascar in nine letters?" As for her invention, invis ible," I can't see it.

Tonally, the "contractility" reveals itself in the great agility, even estlessness, which Miss Moore imparts to her poetry by assonance, in-ernal rhyme, and her many variants of the run-over line. We should also ote those sudden nodules of sound which are scattered throughout her erses, such quick concentrations as "rude root cudgel," "the raised de-ice reversed," "trim trio on the tree-stem," "furled fringed frill," or tonal pisodes more sustained and complex, as the lines on the birds in Ireland already quoted), or the title, "Walking-Sticks and Paper-Weights and Vater-Marks," or

...the redbird
the red-coated musketeer,
the trumpet-flower, the cavalier,
the parson, and the
wild parishioner. A deer-
track in a church-floor
brick...

One noticeable difference between the later selection and the earlier ne is omission of poems on method. In *Selected Poems* there were a great ıany such. I think for instance of: "Poetry," containing her ingenious onceit, "imaginary gardens with real toads in them"; "Critics and Con-oisseurs"; "The Monkeys"; "In the Days of Prismatic Colour"; "Pick-ıg and Choosing"; "When I Buy Pictures"; "Novices" (on action in ınguage, and developed in imagery of the sea); "The Past is the Present" "ecstasy affords / the occasion and expediency determines the form"); nd one which propounds a doctrine as its title: "In This Age of Hard rying, Nonchalance is Good and."

But though methodological pronouncements of this sort have dropped way, in the closing poem on "The Paper Nautilus," the theme does re-ppear. Yet in an almost startlingly deepened transformation. Here, pro-aiming the poet's attachment to the poem, there are likenesses to the ıaternal attachment to the young. And the themes of bondage and free-om (as with one "hindered to succeed") are fiercely and flashingly ıerged.

RICHARD WRIGHT:

The Man Who Lived Underground

Two Excerpts from a Novel

He headed toward the opening that would allow him to crawl to h dirt room and a sense of quiet expectancy suffused his entire being; t sensations of his body were given over without reservation to the elabora emotional game he was playing with himself. When he reached the openi he pushed the sack in and climbed in himself. It was arduous work; firs he had to stretch out his arms full length, push the sack; then, clutchi the pipe above him, he would draw himself forward. He finally reach the end of the passageway and gave the sack a hard shove and heard hit the dirt floor beyond. When he struck the ground, it was with difficul that he kept on his feet. For a long time he did not stir, then he sho his head and wiped sweat from his brow with his sleeve. He struck a mat and contemplated his loot; the match died and he worked in darkne Seeing with his fingers, he emptied the sack and set each item neatly the earth floor.

He lit another one of his few remaining matches and bent over t tool box and took out the bulb, the socket, and the wire; he discovered his elation that there was a double socket on one end of the wire. H crammed the stuff into his pocket as the match flickered out. He hoist himself again upon the rusty pipes upon which he had lain and watch the men and women singing their hymns, and peered through a slit; t church was dim and empty. Somewhere in the wall that separated hi from that church were live electric wires. But where? He lowered hi self to the ground. It must be . . . Yes, he had got lost in an opening th led out of this dirt room and now he would go into that opening again a dig into a wall until he encountered an electric wire. As fast as the dar ness would permit, he groped his way into the opening and tapped t brick wall with the butt of the screw-driver, listening vainly for holl sounds. I'll just have to take a chance and dig, he said.

He found the wall to be of a much newer brick than the ones he h broken into before. He tried for an hour to dislodge a brick, but wi no success. He struck a match and was terribly disappointed to find th he had dug a depth of only an inch! Ain't no use in fooling with th he said with a profound sigh. He wondered what move he could ma now; he raised his eyes and looked upward by the flickering light of match, then lowered his eyes, only to glance up again, startled at what had seen. Directly above his head was a wealth of electric wiring runni

along the entire length of the low ceiling. I'll be damned, he said, snickering.

He went back to the tool box and found an old, dull knife and returned to the black passageway. Seeing with his fingers, he proceeded to separate the two strands of wire and cut away the insulation. It was slow work and once or twice he received a slight shock. He scraped the wiring clean and finally managed to join the two ends of each wire. He took the bulb from his pocket and screwed it in; the illumination was so sudden that it blinded him and he shut his lids involuntarily to kill the stinging pain in his eyeballs. He turned off the light by loosening the bulb. Well, I got that much done, he thought jubilantly.

With the bulb and socket in hand, he walked back to the dirt room and placed the bulb on the floor and screwed it in tightly; the light cast a strange gleam on the bleak clay walls. The room was like an abandoned cave. Accustomed now to the glow, he plugged one end of the wire that dangled from the radio into the light socket and bent down and switched on a button and almost at once he caught the harsh sound of static, but there were no words or music. How come it don't work? he asked himself.

He toyed with the many little dials of the radio and wondered if he had damaged the mechanism in any way. Perhaps it needed grounding. He rummaged in the tool box and found another length of wire, which he fastened to the ground of the radio; then he tied the opposite end to one of the rusty pipes over his head. Rising and growing distinct, a soft, slow strain of music emerged and entranced him with its measured sound. He brought the tool box and placed it against the wall and sat. He was deliriously happy. He rummaged again in the tool box and found a half-gallon can of glue; he opened it and smelt a sharp odor. He set the can down and explored the rest of the tool box at leisure; there were nails, tacks, bolts, screws, and a hundred and one other little minor gadgets, some rusty and some new.

Then he remembered suddenly that he had not even looked at the money. He sat again upon the tool box and picked up a batch of green bills and weighed it in his palm. He broke the seal on the wad and held one of the bills up to the light and studied it closely. *The United States of America will pay to the bearer on demand one hundred dollars,* he read in slow speech; and then: *This note is legal tender for all debts public and private* . . . He broke into a slow, musing laugh. He felt that he was reading of the petty doings of a race of people who lived in some far-off planet. He turned the bill over and saw a beautiful white building with slender, soaring columns and wide, curving steps leading up to an imposing entrance. He had no impulse to count the money; it was what it stood for—all the manifold currents of life swirling above ground—that captivated him. Next he opened up the rolls of coins and let them slide from their paper wrappings to the ground; the gleaming pennies and nickels and dimes piled high in front of him, a bright mound of shimmering

silver and copper. He toyed with a few of the coins and sifted them through his fingers, listening to their tinkle as they struck the conical pile.

He got the typewriter and pulled it forward and took a sheet of paper and inserted it into the machine and typed: *itwasalonghotday* . . . He looked at it and was determined to type the sentence without making any mistakes. But how did one make capital letters? He tried one way and another until he discovered how to lock the machine. Now he could not make anything but capital letters! He experimented further and luckily found how to lock the machine for capital letters and then shift it back to an adjustment for lower case. Next he learned how to make spaces. Then he wrote correctly and carefully: *It was a long hot day.* The sheet was dirty and he took it out of the machine and inserted another sheet and retyped the sentence in neat, black characters without making a single error. Just why he picked that particular sentence, he did not know; it was merely the ritual of performing the thing. Holding the white sheet with the single sentence printed across its middle, he looked around, his neck stiff, his eyes hard, and he spoke to some imaginary person:

"Yes, I'll have the contracts ready tomorrow."

He laughed. That's just the way they talk, he said to himself in a voice devoid of all envy. He grew weary of the game and pushed the machine aside. Yeah, I'll make me another cigarette. He rolled tobacco in brown wrapping paper and when he lit the clumsy cigarette he thought for a moment that he had set his stubby beard afire. He held the damp wad of tobacco far out from him until the flame died. When he sucked the smoke into his lungs it burned. I'll find some cigarettes before I get through with this, he told himself. Just what he meant when he said "through with this" did not occur to him. The future was not a reality; the future was the present, an everlasting present.

He gazed about restlessly at the clay walls and then his eyes fell upon the can of glue and quick as lightning a mischievous idea bloomed in him, filling him again with nervous eagerness. He leaped up and opened the can of glue and set it upon the tool box; then he broke open one of the wads of bills. I'm going to have me some wallpaper, he said with a luxurious, sensual laugh. He took the strip of toweling which he had used to tie the sack and balled it into a swab and dipped it into the can and dabbed glue onto an area of the wall about a foot square; then he pasted one green bill neatly by the side of another green bill. He stepped back and cocked his head. Jesus! That's funny . . . ! He bent to his knees and slapped his thighs and guffawed. He had triumphed over the world above ground.

He finally controlled his laughter and swabbed all four of the dirt walls with glue and pasted them with green bills; when he finished he stood in the center of the room and marvelled at the strange effect—the walls seemed ablaze with an indescribable yellow-green fire. He decided that this room would be his den, his main hideout. Between him and the world that had rejected him would stand this mocking symbol of his victory.

over the world; these green bills would remind him hourly that he was no longer subject to the code of the world. He had not stolen this money; he had simply taken it, just as a man would pick up firewood in a forest. And that was how the world above ground seemed to him, a wild forest filled with death, stalked by blind animals.

The walls of money finally palled on him and he grew sleepy, but there was no fun using a tool box for a pillow. One impulse in him urged him to start exploring again in the sewers, and another told him to lie down and take a nap. The impulse to wander prevailed and he rose and clicked off the light and radio and went to the opening and climbed through and stood once more in the glassy water, watching the checkered pattern wrought by the light falling from the manhole cover. He tramped forward with the rod and passed the street intersection where he had gone to get the money and went on past other passageways that led off to left and right, but for some reason he did not want to inspect them. He sloshed for almost an hour and suddenly, when he put his right foot forward at a street intersection, he fell backward and shot down violently into the grey water. In a spasm of terror his right hand clutched the rod and he felt the streaking water tugging at his body. The current reached his neck and for a moment he was stationary; his chest heaved and it was some time before he realized what had happened to him. He had dropped into a down-curve and had saved himself only because the rod had caught on either side of the hole. He took quick stock of his plight; if he moved clumsily he might be sucked under after all. He grasped the rod with both hands and slowly worked himself over to one side of the down-curve and grabbed hold of a concrete edge. He heaved a deep sigh and pulled himself up and stood again in the sweeping water; he peered about, thankful he had missed death.

* * * *

How long he slept he did not know, but he slept more profoundly than men sleep from physiological fatigue. During the entire time not one portion of his body moved and his flesh was icy to the touch; the palms of his hands, however, were sweaty. The church singing stopped and in the silence and darkness that followed he really did not exist as a personality; his emotional state had reached a high point in its tensity and had suspended. As though for purposes of renewal, he had for a time gone back into the insensible world out of which life had originally sprung, and, before he could live again, hope or plan again, a regrouping of his faculties into a new personality structure would be necessary. It was an organic pause, such as one takes in breathing. During the past turbulent hours he had endured experiences which were like sucking his lungs full of air; but now, having drained the life-fostering oxygen from the air, he was expelling the residue of poison, leaving the tiny air sacs deflated, ready to be refilled.

He groaned and a drool of spittle trickled down from a corner of his mouth. With effort he rolled over on his back and belched and swallowed

and sighed. Reluctantly, he propped up one knee and dragged the bottom of his left foot over the ground; he allowed his leg to remain in this position as though to ease some muscular strain. Then, while still sleeping he pulled himself to a sitting posture. Yeah, he whispered vaguely. He lifted his right hand and rubbed it nervously over his face; he blinked his eyes several times and sneezed. He was fully awake now. He sought to recapture and understand the storm of passion that had laid him low, but his mind refused to function. Rising, he lurched unsteadily with a lean, taut hunger in his body and groped for the electric bulb and twisted it and the bright light pained his eyes. He blinked and looked about the floor; yes, there was the metal box of rings, the glass jar full of diamonds, the bloody meat cleaver, the radio, the tool chest, and the walls plastered with green bills glowing in the yellow light. He laughed when he saw the pile of copper and silver coins glittering beside him. He had forgotten these things and quiet amazement crept into him as he saw them again. They seemed to stand for events that had happened in another life. The old tensity which had driven him to seek out so many experiences was now gone and he seemed to be in the grip of forces stemming not from his body but from without, from this yellow light, these shimmering coins, these walls of green fire, this bloody blade of steel; and he felt that the true identity of these forces would slowly reveal themselves, not only to him but also to others. Once or twice he made an effort to take hold of himself to shake off this weird feeling, to go back to his former state, for he was afraid of this strange land; but the task of eluding these new forces was difficult and he shrugged his shoulders in surrender.

He felt in his pocket for a cigarette and was astonished when he pulled forth a fistful of ticking golden watches that dangled by gleaming chains. Idly he stared at them, then he began to wind them up; he did not even attempt to set any of the watches at a certain hour, for there was no time for him now. After winding them carefully his eyes strayed over the green-papered walls and a slow, mocking smile broke over his lips. He was as sorry for himself as he looked at that money as he had been for the man he had seen stealing it; his memory was merged with the lives of others and he no longer appreciated the mood of high deviltry that had bubbled in him when he had decorated the walls. But, since he had the watches in his possession, he had to dispose of them in some way. He held the watches and heard their awful ticking and he hated them; these watches were measuring time, making men tense and taut with the sense of passing hours, telling tales of death, crowning time the king of consciousness.

He turned to the tool box and took out a handful of nails and a hammer and he drove the nails into the papered walls and hung the watches upon them, letting them swing down by their glittering chains, ticking busily against the background of green bills with the lemon sheen of the electric bulb shining dully upon the metal watch casings, convert

ng discs of yellow into blobs of liquid. Hardly had he hung up the last vatch than the idea upon which he had been working extended itself; ie took more nails from the tool box and went around the walls and drove hem through the green paper and then took the box of rings and went rom nail to nail and hung up the gold bands. The white and blue dia- nonds sparkled with quiet and brittle laughter, as though enjoying a ilarious secret. The room had a bizarre and ghostly aspect; the yellow ight tinged the green money to a fiery cast and, against this blazing back- drop, the gold of the rings and watches, and the blue-white laughter of he diamonds leaped burningly to life. People sure can do some funny hings, he said to himself.

He was suddenly conscious of the gun sagging at his hip and he drew t from the holster and held it in his hand. Never in his life had he fired a gun. He had seen men fire guns in movies, but somehow his life had never led him to contact with firearms. A desire to feel the sensation others felt in firing a gun came over him. But perhaps someone might hear him? If they did, they would not be able to tell where the shot had come from. Not in their wildest imagination would they say: *Look under the streets and find out who shot that gun!* He lifted the gun and pointed it at the green-papered wall and tightened his finger on the trigger and there was a deafening report and it seemed that the entire underground had caved in upon his eardrums and in the same instant there flashed in front of his eyes an orange-blue spurt of flame that died quickly but lingered on and he did not know, so vivid did the image remain, if the flame still existed or not. Then he smelt the acrid odor of burnt powder; he felt it filling his lungs. Abruptly his fingers loosened and the gun dropped to the ground. He felt that if he had held the gun in his hand a moment longer, feeling its cold slick metal against his feverish palms, he would have been embracing death in its most meaningless and stupid form.

The intensity of his emotions ebbed and he picked up the gun and hung it upon a nail in the wall; then he hung up the cartridge belt. For a long time he watched the liquid sheen of the yellow turn purple upon the blue surface of the gun barrel. The gun had a personality which he resented; he turned his back upon it and saw the jar of diamonds and at once he had another idea. He lifted the jar and turned it bottom upwards and the entire contents dumped upon the ground and he stared at the little white pellets. Like a child deeply engrossed in a game, he picked up the dia- monds one by one and peeled the tissue paper from them and laid them in a neat pile in the dirt at his feet. He wiped his sweaty hands dry on his trousers and lit a cigarette and commenced playing another secret game with himself. He was a rich man who lived in the world above ground, one of those important men who walked through the obscene sun- shine, and he was strolling through a beautiful park of a summer morning, smiling, nodding to his neighbors, sucking his after-breakfast cigar. Many

times he crossed the dirt floor, avoiding the diamonds with his feet, bu gauging his footsteps so that his shoes, damp with sewer lime, would strik the diamonds at some undetermined moment squarely but accidentall After five minutes of sauntering, his right foot smashed into the nea heap and the diamonds lay scattered in all directions, glinting at him wit a million tiny chuckles of icy laughter. Oh, shucks, he mumbled in moc regret, intrigued by the damage he had wrought. He continued walkin ignoring the brittle fire of the diamonds. He felt that he had locked dee within the recesses of his heart a glorious triumph.

Later he paused and flung the diamonds more evenly over the dir floor; they showered sparks, collaborating with him, enjoying his gam revelling in its rebellious richness. Then he went over the entire are of the room, trampled the diamonds just deep enough into the dry eart for them to be faintly visible and cast their wavering glitter, as thoug they were set delicately in the prongs of a thousand rings. He steppe back and contemplated the effect he had wrought: a baleful, icy glan bathed the room. He sat on the tool box, lit a cigarette, mused, frowne and shook his head.

JACKSON MAC LOW:
The Odyssey of Despair

The squalid mountain that defaced his view
seemed to fill the landscape more and more
each day he watched: it stole the maple woods,
the village huts, the steeple, even came
to blot out all the fields except his own,
and these were not immune for they were less
each time he looked; he found at night the stars,
by day the clouds, could less and less be seen,
grew panicky at last lest all his house
and substance and himself should be engulfed
by this unmoving paradoxic peak,
put sandbags by his walls, blocked out the view
with shades and hangings lest he die of fear,
but knew it still advanced beyond his sight
so backed his tables, lamps, and ottomans
as far away as possible, and died.

DELMORE SCHWARTZ:

The Writing of Edmund Wilson

Readers of Edmund Wilson's latest collection of essays ought to go back to his novel, *I Thought of Daisy* (1929). The view of the artist and of the genesis of literary works which has become a method for Wilson in *The Wound and the Bow* is stated there in terms of personal experience. It is not perfectly clear that *I Thought of Daisy* is a novel — its success depends too much upon two long meditations on the hero's part, and not on any dramatic action — but, in any case, it is a good book, better now, perhaps, than when published, for it can be seen as defining a period (as a photograph gains new qualities with the passage of time), but most of all because it makes clear Wilson's basic attitudes as an author.

The Wound and the Bow rests upon the thesis that the artist is strong and weak at the same time; his great virtue as an artist inseparable from his weakness; his weakness perhaps (Wilson is not too clear on this point) the cause or one of the causes of his strength; or, to use Wilson's sentence, the artist is "the victim of a malodorous disease which renders him abhorrent to society and periodically degrades him and makes him helpless; but is also the master of a superhuman art which everybody has to respect and which the normal man finds he needs."

Just this conception of the artist upsets the unnamed hero of *I Thought of Daisy*. Of this unnamed "I," one gets a most touching image in the course of the novel. He is a modest and humble young man who wants to write verse and to know the interesting intellectual and artistic people in the New York of the Twenties. But this is not the right way to state his complex attitude, for it seems at times that what he wants most of all is to know Life, to break out of his own personal isolation and limitation into Life at its best; and Life at its best he takes to be the literary life in the best sense of the phrase. He does not draw a sharp distinction between literary people and literary works. He admires the literary people of his acquaintance—among them, the famous poetess and the famous novelist—and is willing to stand for a great deal from them. But they often disgust him: there is a gap between the nobility of their writing, and the stupidity, viciousness, weakness, and self-absorption of their lives. What good is literature, after all, he asks himself, if it must arise from such lives? This question is inspired by a disagreeable, utterly pointless Greenwich Village drinking party, but it leads the hero to a feeling of doubt about the worth of literature and the literary life in which he turns on Dostoyevsky and Sophocles (both cited in *The Wound and the Bow*) and rejects them also because their great works seem to have been generated by lives which are equally offensive. In the end, this

emotion is transcended by a new attitude, an attitude of critical and reasonable acceptance, on the part of the hero, of the people he knows. He accepts them as inextricable mixtures of good and evil. How this attitude is arrived at in the novel is not relevant right now; the point here is the way in which the resolution of shifting attitudes in *I Thought of Daisy* can be seen as the keynote of all of Wilson's writing. Some of the hero's concluding thoughts might well serve as quotations for the title pages of the critic's later books:

> So, by the way of literature itself, I should break through into the real world. . . . On that very day when she [the famous poetess] had filled my imagination with the splendor of her genius and her beauty, when she had seemed to me a goddess or a muse—on that day, her own mind had been haunted by visions of imbecility and deformity.

These phrases and thoughts echo through *Axel's Castle,* the critical work which established Wilson's position. Amid a careful, reflective, judicious analysis of Yeats, Joyce, Proust, and Valéry, one can hear again and again the reproaches of the unnamed hero of *I Thought of Daisy.* Valéry, for instance, is reproached for his condemnation of Anatole France on an occasion—his election to the French Academy to take France's seat—when the customary thing was to compose an eulogy. This is, says Wilson, pretentiousness and snobbery; and one feels that the reproach is directed not against literary taste or opinion, but against *a person.* It is as a person, too, that Proust seems to be reproached as engaged in "self-coddling, chronic complaining, over-cultivated sensibility"—Wilson quotes a French critic's remark that there was much of the spoiled child in Proust. And yet Wilson says also that these elements were important factors in the making of Proust's great work. And the whole movement of which *Axel's Castle* is a proposed history is accused of "over-cultivated sensibility" and of not being at the center of life, even as Joyce is scolded, in passing, because he did not make the reading of his work easier for the common reader by providing introductions. As a history, *Axel's Castle* suffers from the virtue of being addressed—how deliberately one does not know—to an audience which is vague in extent, but is certainly constituted for the most part of readers who would like to be helped to read the difficult new authors. The essays are good introductions for such readers (*Axel's Castle* ran first as a serial in the *New Republic*) ; but for the reader who has mastered Proust and Joyce, there is little which he really needs. To define the point further, the book is not the kind of criticism which helps to germinate new writing; it is not a book for writers. The definition of Symbolism intended to unify the book is so general and so loose that it permits the inclusion of authors who are really apart from Symbolism, such as Yeats. "To intimate things rather than to state them plainly was thus one of the primary aims of the symbolists," to compete with the suggestiveness of music, "to communicate unique personal feelings by a complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors"—this is the closest Wilson can come to a *literary* definition, although he is

excellent on the social and intellectual background of Symbolism.

Actually Symbolism was a prolonged cultivation of the power of language for its own sake which eventuated in an emphasis upon the connotative usages of language to an exclusion, varying from author to author, of the denotative usages. The purest and completest example is Mallarmé. Wilson knows very well and paints with sure strokes the isolation of the artist from the rest of society which brought about the desire and the need to cultivate language in this way. He knows the Life in back of the work. But when it becomes a point of describing the technical working, the craftsmanship and the unique forms, which are an essential part of Symbolism, and the authors who were greatly influenced by the Symbolists, Wilson is impatient and hurried. He is not actually interested in the formal working which delivers the subject-matter to the reader (as the rhyme-scheme of a limerick delivers its wit). It is for him the wrapping-paper which covers the gift; it is necessary to spend some time taking off the wrapping-paper and undoing the difficult knots of the cord tied about it, but the main thing is the gift inside, the subject-matter, which always turns out to be an intimate life: in *Ulysses,* we "possess Dublin seen, smelt, heard, and felt, brooded over, imagined, and remembered." So, by way of literature, one can break through into the real world. It is Life that matters; books are a way of getting into Life; we forget the formal character of the book as we forget the door through which we came into the house. *Axel's Castle* concludes by suggesting that, important as the authors in question are and unique and valuable though their discoveries may be in the future, literature must return to wholesome objectivity—not, however, without remembering and using the discoveries of these authors.

Axel's Castle appeared in 1931, two years after *I Thought of Daisy.* By this time, Life had broken in on every private life, however isolated and limited. The social decade of American literature had begun, showing itself first in the intellectual uneasiness of the Neo-Humanist controversy, and then, as the Depression continued, in the explicit affirmations and denials of the importance of social consciousness and class allegiances in literature.

The effect upon Wilson was profound; and partly, it would seem, because he had already felt, before the Depression and before almost any other author of his generation, the relevance of social criticism, and the intimate relationship between the individual and the society which gave him life and kept him alive. Most authors of the Twenties had been able to express their criticism and rejection of our business civilization merely in some version of the attitudes made popular and colorful by H. L. Mencken. The phrase, "the civilized minority," expresses and virtually exhausts the insight which these authors depended upon. The curious resemblances one can find between H. L. Mencken and Edna St. Vincent Millay, so far as their leading attitudes and sentiments go, sum up the period. Wilson admired both these authors—in later years, he seems

unable to forget to be loyal to these admirations, as if loyalty were actually relevant, as if it were once more friendship and not literature that was in question—but in his going from an editorship of *Vanity Fair* to the literary editorship of the *New Republic*, the development of his interests, before the Depression, is clear. It is clear too in his admiration of John Dos Passos, the one important author of the Twenties who really depended upon an explicit social consciousness.

The result was that Wilson was prepared for the Thirties, and the three books he wrote after *Axel's Castle* are a direct and a strong product of the impress of the Depression upon him. *The American Jitters, Travels in Two Democracies*, and *To the Finland Station* are all efforts inspired by an interest in the Depression and in Socialism. The first two works are on the surface merely superior notebooks; but the sensibility and the honesty of the traveller are so great that these works are far more than journalism. Both contain chapters which, with hardly a change, might have been part of *I Thought of Daisy*. The last chapter of *The American Jitters* presents "The Case of the Author": after declaring his rejection of American capitalism and the life it made possible, and after affirming his acceptance of Marxism as a correct analysis of society and of the necessity of socialism, Wilson goes on to apply the Marxist formula to himself:

> My family have on both sides belonged for several generations to what used to be called the learned professions. . . . My father's and uncles' generation were obviously alienated by their old-fashioned education from the world of the great American money-making period. . . . My father, for example, was a lawyer in New Jersey and at one time Attorney-General of the state; but his love of independence and his distrust of big business were so great that he stuck all his life to his miscellaneous local practice and resisted all temptations to become a corporation lawyer in a state governed by corporations. He even refused to invest in the corporations. . . . One of the results of this [family background] has been that I have grown up in modern prosperous America with a slightly outside point of view, due not merely to the professional tradition in the family . . . but also to the fact that my family have never really departed very far from the old American life of the countryside and the provincial cities. . . . It began to dawn on me that the best people were usually satisfied with a very thin grade of culture, that when you tried to go into the adventures of creation or the exploration of the causes of things they didn't follow or approve of you. . . . My life had seemed to me both false and dull. . . . I have tried at one time or another all the attitudes with which thoughtful Americans have attempted to reconcile themselves to the brokers' world . . . . they were all ways of compromising with the broker.

These sentences point to a depth of feeling and attitude on Wilson's part which is not stated in theory but which is made perfectly clear in its applications and concrete instances. The right phrase is difficult to find: "fundamental decency" will have to do, and it will do very well if it reminds the reader of the heroes of Henry James. This sense of a fundamental decency, a living remnant perhaps of Christianity, operates in the hero of *I Thought of Daisy* when he resents the excesses and weaknesses of literary people, even though he is much more appalled by the

business civilization against which they are rebelling. He is thinking of the dignified and self-contained *person* of "the old American life" when he is dismayed by the anger and hatred in Dante, the weakness and viciousness in the life of Dostoyevsky, the savagery and madness in the life of Sophocles, or when he reproves Valéry for priggishness and Proust for coddling himself, or when he speaks of "rather childish" rages of Greek heroes, actual and imaginary.

The picture can be rounded out, perhaps too patly, if we jump ahead to the moment in *Travels in Two Democracies* when the traveller, disappointed and dismayed by the squalor, drabness, and narrowness of the brave new world of Soviet Russia, turns with immense pleasure to the poetry of Elinor Wylie, a pure although dead product of "the old American life": "I had never before felt so vividly the rarity and value of people who could do something fine very well."

Travels in Two Democracies continues the excellent reporting, the clear, sensitive descriptive prose, of *The American Jitters*. One remarkable chapter, "The Old Stone House," describes a place where "the old American life" was lived; and the book concludes, after the traveller's fundamental decency has been shocked any number of times in America and the Soviet Union, with an almost lyrical return to the individual who determines his own existence with strength of character—"accuracy of insight," "courage of judgment" independent of "obsolete authorities," "invisible forces," and "all the names in all the books."

This disillusion and return corresponds not only to the disillusion with the literary life in *I Thought of Daisy*, but also and more importantly with a breaking of the spell of Marxism, a spell which had never been complete. It apparently stopped and modified the writing of Wilson's next and most ambitious book, *To the Finland Station*. The same thing happened in the writing of John Dos Passos's *U. S. A.*, in between the second and third novels. Both instances are very interesting examples of Life breaking in on the author.

To the Finland Station is an important work in itself, apart from its connection with, and the light it sheds upon, all of Wilson's writing. What is relevant here is the continued and indeed the augmented interest in persons. Although he is writing about men who made or wrote history, it is to personal traits that he returns again and again, dwelling, for example, upon Karl Marx's family life (and with especial love upon the Sunday picnics of the Marx family), Lenin's asceticism, and Trotsky's pride of intellect. This process of mind arrives sometimes at absurdity, as when Wilson suggests that Bakunin's politics had their real origin in the conspirational games he played with his sister when he was a boy; and it keeps the book from complete success by suggesting that the failure of the Russian Revolution was a failure of Trotsky and Lenin as persons; or perhaps one should say the embodiment of their personal defects in political and social policies. Or again, Marx's personal traits and failings are suggested as causes of the inadequacy of Marxism. On the other hand,

the book justifies itself precisely because it contains so many good portraits of persons. The same excellence of portraiture is to be found in *The Triple Thinkers,* published before *To the Finland Station.* The essays on A. E. Housman and Paul Elmer More are actually concerned with these two men as inadequate human beings, and again we are presented with—and gratified by—the reproofs Wilson administers to them. It is perhaps because Housman and More are in so many ways inferior to Valéry and Proust as authors that the personal emphasis and judgment seem just and worth bringing to the forefront of attention. Elsewhere in the book is an essay on Flaubert's politics, in which, by the additional device of quoting from two letters of Flaubert, the novelist is used as a figure of the proper attitude of the artist toward the social problems and the social claims of his time, and towards life as a whole. And then there is what is perhaps Wilson's best essay, on Pushkin, in which the feats of introduction which marked *Axel's Castle* are repeated, but this time with an author not otherwise available to most readers, and with more concern perhaps as a consequence, with *placing* his literary quality, an act performed by citing Byron and Keats.

In the same essay, Wilson resumes the habit of breaking through to the subject-matter: he provides the reader with a very interesting synopsis of the plot of *Evgeni Onegin.* This is mentioned particularly because in another essay of this book, "Is Verse a Dying Technique?," it is just this conception of the relationship of form to subject-matter and just this habit of wanting to get as quickly as possible to the subject-matter in itself that leads Wilson to suppose that versification is finished, at least for the modern author. This is far from being the first time that Wilson has felt this is to be so. In an essay published in 1926, Wilson reviewed American writing and in passing spoke of Marianne Moore, asking whether or not it was actually possible to consider her verse poetry. In *Axel's Castle,* Wilson makes the point that Joyce is really a poet. But in this essay of *The Triple Thinkers,* Wilson is prepared to go much further and to suppose that devices of versification are no longer necessary to the ambitious modern author.

Wilson's reasons are mixed. It would seem that one reason for this view is the fact that William Butler Yeats and Edna St. Vincent Millay, taken together and providing a common denominator, appear to serve Wilson as a touchstone for what verse, as verse, ought to be, so that as a consequence he views with much suspicion such a poet as Auden, who seems to be using too many of the devices of prose and whose verse-writing seems to sound too much like prose. But a more important and less limited reason is the fact, which Wilson cites at length, that the major literary works of the last one hundred years have been in prose and not in verse. But most of all, I think, Wilson is prepared to regard versification as a dying technique because the formal character of the work is for him merely the wrapping of the package. It does not seem to be necessary to the representation of the subject-matter, which is what we really want.

This is not the place to discuss this view at length. It should be enough, so far as this essay goes, to point out that what we really want is the formal character of the literary work penetrating, illuminating, and uniting with the subject-matter. Moreover, the major prose authors who, for Wilson, have succeeded the major poets not only learned a great deal from versification as a technique, but in their prose works reveal a dependence upon rhythm and metaphor which would be impossible without a thriving school of versifiers and body of versification: Baudelaire and Hugo influenced Flaubert, just as the poets of the Nineties and the early Yeats influenced Joyce. But it is Wilson's attitude toward literary technique which I want to underline once more, in this instance.[1]

The Wound and the Bow represents the next, the latest, and one should think the last step in Wilson's interest in the author as a person and in the literary work as a means of getting to know the person. About two-thirds of the book is devoted to Dickens and to Kipling; the rest is made up of fairly short essays on Casanova, Edith Wharton, Hemingway, *Finnegans Wake,* and the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles, (this last serving to explain in the form of fable the inseparable weakness and strength of the artist). In each author some weakness, pain, or sorrow—such as blindness in Joyce, a nervous breakdown in Edith Wharton, childhood unhappiness and marital difficulty in Dickens and Kipling, old age and cruel sons for Sophocles—seems to Wilson to be one of the prime factors in the creation of the literary work. I say *one* of the prime factors, although at times Wilson writes as if it were *the* prime factor; indeed, he goes so far as to say of one of Dickens' novels that it cannot be understood without reference to his personal life—so that there is the inevitable suggestion that perhaps all of these authors were mistaken in their method: what they should have done first of all, even if they did nothing else, was to provide a full *dossier* of their childhood and their married life. This is to press Wilson's view to an absurd extreme, of course; but the suggestion is there, and it renews itself whenever the personal connection is forced, or overburdened, as an explanation of the genesis and the *interest* of the work.

In the long essay on Dickens, it is quite evident that Wilson has not forgotten all that he learned from Marxism. There is an effort throughout to see the social aspect as well as the purely personal aspect of the trauma which is to mean so much in the writing of Dickens. The six-month period spent by Dickens at the age of twelve in a blacking bottle factory is seen

1. *The Boys in the Back Room* represents another aspect of the same fundamental attitude toward literature. In this small book, published last year by the Colt Press, Wilson writes of authors who, apart from Steinbeck and Saroyan, are what circulating libraries call "good rentals." His remarks are as usual penetrating, and what he has to say about Steinbeck is especially revealing; but it is perfectly clear that what makes these authors interesting to Wilson is the fact that they are significant products of Hollywood and California. Hollywood and California and Life are what make him pay so much serious attention to such authors, whose lack of literary distinction he is aware of. The boys in the back room have always been very interesting to one intent on breaking into the real world, and this may also be why Wilson has long been fascinated by Hemingway.

as a fall in the social scale as well as a shocking episode in the life of a boy who is in despair because he has been taken out of school. But the union of Freud and Marx is incomplete, and the Freudian emphasis wins out. Thus in writing of the very poor books which Edith Wharton produced during the last twelve years of her life, Wilson suggests, although without conviction, that it is mainly the fading of the shock of the nervous breakdown which made her begin to write—this fading of the trauma together with a lack of a professional sense of authorship—which explains the poor writing. Yet there is a much better explanation in the work itself, and particularly in the shift in subject-matter. We can see how Mrs. Wharton lost most of her fine power every time she abandoned her genuine subject-matter, the conflict between a rising plutocracy and the morality of the old merchant society of her forbears; and we can see how she made a perfect recovery each time she went back to this subject-matter by returning to the periods in which it was best located, first in *The Age of Innocence* (which Wilson underestimates) and the four small novels about *Old New York,* and later in her last and unfinished book, *The Buccaneers.*

The same thing is true of what Wilson has to say, in general, of Kipling: the personal situation is emphasized to the extreme where one almost forgets, critic and reader both, that a much simpler and much more persuasive explanation of Kipling's decline is to be found in the difficulty of maintaining and nourishing the view of the British Empire which inspired him to write at the very start. I do not want to press forward the claims of social criticism beyond a certain point. The difficulty in *The Wound and the Bow* is the converse of this, the over-emphasis of the personal event, and the personal situation. And even if the Freudian analysis is taken as a primary explanation, it is clear that Wilson does not want to adopt it with any degree of fullness. Thus Dickens' childhood exile in the blacking factory, which was to become so important a factor, brought about a renewal of nervous fits Dickens had known in earlier childhood. But of course, for the true and thoroughgoing Freudian, the important thing is the cause of these nervous fits in earlier childhood and not their recurrence at the age of twelve, a very late date in the psyche from the Freudian standpoint.

Yet one of Wilson's virtues as an author has always been to avoid giving himself to any systematic view of Life, to see how Life is more than any systematic view of it, but at the same time to see how systematic views are useful instruments. This *roundedness* of feeling and interest was apparent in the books Wilson wrote in the Thirties, when Marxism was uppermost in his mind, and it is clear in *The Wound and the Bow,* too. If the long essays on Dickens and Kipling press an amateur Freudianism too far they nevertheless contain notes on much else, and they carry forward the old concern with authors as human beings: Kipling is reproached for snobbery and for excessive anger, as Housman and More were condemned for similar faults. If we try to take these factors as causes of the work, we are bound to be dissatisfied; there is too much complication in the genesis

of any literary work, despite the *Philoctetes*.[1] But if we see this interest in the human being in the context of such books as *I Thought of Daisy* and *Travels in Two Democracies*, if we remember the tone and lucidity of Wilson's prose throughout, then it is easy to understand and to accept not only the thoughts and observations in this new work, but the whole body of Wilson's writing.

Is it not true, I mean to say, that literary history and literary criticism have always been merely pretexts for Wilson? For we do not get from his ostensibly critical essays the strict formal analysis, which is one kind of traditional literary criticism; we do not get the reformation, correction, and extension of taste, which is another important kind; nor do we get the propagation of the leading ideas of an age, which is a third kind and which also tends to forget the literary work as such. Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, and T. S. Eliot illustrate in different aspects of their work each of these kinds, for good or for evil as the case may be, and we can see how Coleridge's criticism helped to bring about the poetry of Wordsworth, how Arnold created the consciousness of Neo-Humanism, and how Eliot reformed taste. But if we look for literary judgment in Wilson, we find a singular weakness and lack of critical pioneering. There is a curious tenderness for such authors as Thornton Wilder, Edna St. Vincent Millay, the later Van Wyck Brooks, Max Eastman, and Henry Miller, an author who merely turns Céline upside-down with a stale optimism. On the other

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1. It is interesting and pleasant to have a critic in America feel the need to refer to Sophocles. But not only does the *Philoctetes* suggest a number of other interpretations quite different from the one Wilson gives it, but we cannot help thinking of the many other classical stories, from Pegasus and Orpheus to Oedipus, which express aspects of the creative situation. Thus, the poet can be viewed in these legends as depending upon a great exaltation, a kind of madness, and ecstasy; or he can be regarded as one who goes down into Hell to regain from death or oblivion that which he loves; or he can be seen as the man who kills his father and marries his mother and whose crime must be revealed and expiated in order that sickness may depart from the city. The latter interpretation is the richest, for it contains the strict Freudian view and yet emphasizes the necessity of revelation, discovery, and knowledge.

Each of these stories is illuminating. There seems to be no reason to insist on one to the exclusion of the others. Various authors seem to be moved to write for a variety of reasons. But there is one thing they have in common, however different they may be, a *mastery of language*; if Wilson were able to show that such a mastery was always traumatic in origin, there might be more reason to emphasize as he does the necessary union of strength and weakness in the creative artist.

Or, to examine Wilson's view in reverse, a number of women in Edith Wharton's time must have suffered from a nervous breakdown consequent upon an unsuccessful marriage. The difference between them and Mrs. Wharton, so far as literary criticism is concerned, is in Mrs. Wharton's literary powers. No doubt such an event as a nervous breakdown had something to do with her becoming an author, but the all-important factor is precisely the grasp of literary devices and forms which Wilson, despite his sensitivity to it, is always brushing aside in his actual scrutiny of his authors. I do not mean to say that a gift for literary expression is itself a simple and irreducible fact; it obviously springs from a complex of conditions; but it is the gift for expression and the expression as such which separates authors from other human beings, whether they suffer from childhood unhappiness, marital failure, psychological disorders, or are beautifully normal. A further possibility is that the unhappiness and disorder of creative lives is the *effect* and not the cause of creative effort, which does, after all, tend to make a human being more sensitive, more easily disturbed, and, last but not least, less able to make a living and be a devoted husband and friend.

Or lastly, to return to the *Philoctetes*, it is clear in the story itself that Philoctetes not only has his matchless bow (it is given him by Heracles) before he suffers his wound, but the wound is in no way connected with the power of the bow. One might contract wounds as a result of having and using a bow, but it seems much less likely that one would gain a bow as a result of being wounded.

hand, there is an equally curious indifference or aversion to such authors as Gide, Kafka, Thomas Mann, Rilke, Wallace Stevens (who really extends the Symbolist movement as much as any of the authors discussed in *Axel's Castle*), and Céline. Thus, Wilson speaks in the same sentence of Proust and Dorothy Parker, and compares Max Eastman favorably with Gide. And there are equivalent defects, as I have tried to point out, in Wilson as a literary historian.

But it does not matter, because the whole of Wilson's work actually represents something else and something just as important as literary history and literary criticism. Once we have seen both history and criticism as a device or pretext or convenient form, we can see how Wilson has provided a history of the American of "fundamental decency," who has come from "the old American life," and has borne this feeling about Life throughout the America of his time, Princeton, the First World War, the Greenwich Village and the New York of the Twenties, the social ferment and the moral disillusion of the Thirties. The actuality of this experience is to be found nowhere else in the writing of our time. It is as if we were provided, to vary an earlier reference, with a history of one of the sons of a hero of Henry James; but this character has not only gone to Europe to bring back the art treasures of the Old World in *Axel's Castle*—he has had his moral experience in the Soviet Union, rather than in the Italy of Milly Theale, or the France of Lambert Strether, who also wanted to break into the real world. Another comparison worth taking with the utmost literalness is to *The Education of Henry Adams,* for in Wilson we have another and later and more difficult education under circumstances which Adams foresaw but did not live to experience. It is an education without conclusion, but fruitful and illuminating in the concreteness of its experience: the Soviet Union, for example, is grasped as something lived through by one kind of American.

And the actuality of the experience, the education, and the American background is rendered by the lucidity and the sensitivity of the prose style. Wilson's prose is above all a *friendly* and a *reasonable* prose; the phrase, "Isn't it true," recurs at crucial moments to express the reasonableness, the judiciousness, and the "fundamental decency" of attitude. It is because this attitude and this tone ring true and carry conviction that we can accept the characteristic act of taking hold of the literary work in order to find the human being, break into the real world, and know Life concretely and fully. The attitude and the assumption at work throughout can be seen perhaps most explicitly by quoting from a passage in *Axel's Castle.*

> It is at the death of Bergotte that Proust's narrator, in what is perhaps the noblest passage of the book, affirms the reality of those obligations, culminating in the obligation of the writer to do his work as it ought to be done, which seem to be derived from some other world, 'based on goodness, scrupulousness, sacrifice,' so little sanction can we recognize them as having in the uncertain and selfish world of humanity—those 'laws which we have obeyed because we have carried their precepts within us without knowing who inscribed them there—those laws to which we are brought by every profound exercise of the intelligence, and which are invisible only—and are they really?—to fools.'

AMONG RECENT BOOKS:

ARTHUR J. CARR:

THOMAS WOLFE: *The Hills Beyond.* Harper.

EDWARD NEWHOUSE: *Anything Can Happen.* Harcourt, Brace.

IRWIN SHAW: *Welcome to the City.* Random House.

EUDORA WELTY: *A Curtain of Green.* Doubleday, Doran.

Thomas Wolfe's *The Hills Beyond* contains part of a novel and some shorter writings never before in print. The major section, from which the book is named, is ten chapters of an unfinished, kaleidoscopic novel dealing with the Pentland-Joyner tribe. Here, as in the story "Chickamauga" (previously published), it is Wolfe's myth-making powers that are displayed; "The Hills Beyond" is a saga, not so much in scope or in projected length as in the heroic dimensions of the imagined characters and actions.

His own recognition of his mythological scheme may partly account for Wolfe's fury at hearing his novels called "autobiography." The tale of Eugene Gant's homecoming to "Altamont" after seven years ("The Return of the Prodigal") is in two parts, "The Thing Imagined" and "The Real Thing"; which is the more "autobiographical" it is not easy to decide. What his writings, in all their abridgments, revisions, expansions, and editings, meant to Thomas Wolfe the writer, who regarded them all as parts of "the book," will be manifest only when we shall have discovered what are the recurrent psychological situations imaged in the symbols of the dead, guardian brother, the waiting mother, the giant, dying father, and in the themes of the lost, the sought, and the found. Although Wolfe's last editor, Edward C. Aswell, calls "The Hills Beyond" Wolfe's "most objective" work, because it contains the fewest "real" people, it may be no less revealing of the author than the confessional pages of "God's Lonely Man," an essay on the Book of Job: "I have found the constant, everlasting weather of man's life to be, not love, but loneliness."

In *Anything Can Happen* Edward Newhouse sketches in a series of brief stories what became of some members of a class that graduated from a New York high school in 1929. Not a bad idea for a start. These are descriptive statements, direct and without editorializing, that get their pertinence from the reader's own sense of the stampedes and disappointments of the 'Thirties. The characters are nicely varied—the fairly successful business man with nowhere to go, the architect who wonders what his blueprints are really for, the cellist who couldn't be as good as Casals, the poet-suicide, and others. But there is only an accidental coherence in the series, no firm ground for contrasting promise with failure, no defined theme, no meaning beyond the statement. "Sure," the reader concludes, "*anything* can happen, and isn't it hell?"

Irwin Shaw strikes the same subject—failure, frustration, the unrecaptured joy, the lost synthesis—but his themes are more narrowly restricted and what can happen is better defined and explored. As a result he tries to solve, if only momentarily, the frustrations he depicts.

What happens is that middle-western youth is defeated in the city, the East, in Hollywood; the man who demands justice may obtain justice and yet lose human fellowship; he who tells the truth as he has seen it dares not do so twice; and writers are silenced by money, insults, fear, the war.

The writer's predicament, which is special and yet typical of many dilemmas, is the theme of numerous stories. Sated with Hollywood, a young writer tries to take in the magnitude of the outbreak of war: "Now is the time, Dutcher thought, for some noble and for-

midable act. Who will supply me with a noble and formidable act?" He is answered by th mental image of a German boy returning safely from a bomber flight into Poland ("The Cit Was In Total Darkness"). In "Material Witness" the man who saw a murder and was a fo to tell—"I advise you to go home. You didn't see nuthin' . . ."—spends a year in custody, im potent against the politically ambitious district attorney. Released, he sees an accident, questioned. " 'Oh, no,' he said, 'I didn't see anything.' And he turned and walked swiftly bac in the direction from which he had come." The penalties of straight talking are set fort repeatedly ("The Dry Rock," "It Happened in Rochester," "Triumph of Justice") as if the were the masks and parables of a writer's defeat, a writer who before the war wrote *Bur the Dead* and must go on writing.

The answers brought forward are temporary, mere abatements to pain, and most tak the form of some return to "nature." The harassed script writer ("Main Currents of Ameri can Thought") goes out to the sandlot: "The sun and the breeze felt good on the baseball field, and he forgot for an hour, but he moved slowly." The incantatory magic of religio still functions among disbelievers to invoke biological fertility ("God on Friday Night"). A bitterly stated incident of anti-semitic violence ("Select Clientele") involves also the writer's problem and suggests a way out that is no escape: "I want to write about things tha never happened and people that never happened. I need a vacation." Somehow, it "helps" that the author's wife is going to have a child.

Nevertheless, the biological consolation is not enough, nor is any kind of love. In the title story of the volume the young man from Davenport, Iowa, finds in the hostile, tawdry metropolis the Garboesque dancer who will love him, welcome him "home." Yet instantly the idyll is slashed with irony: her teeth are "ruined" and her career broken "because once in 1936, a bald man from a Metal-Trades Union had put an olive in her navel."

Absent from these stories by Newhouse and by Shaw is dramatic protest and affirmation. To them the reader must add his own response to the psychological and social crisis of our times. They are meant to be continued in the headlines. Topical and at present appealing, the stories are likely to become less affecting when the tenor of the headlines changes.

The stories by Eudora Welty are not thus vulnerable. Not transcribing usually from literal observation, working instead through images constructed and elaborated, she sets forth the situations in a highly compressed narrative capable of swift action and of deliberate psychological exposition. Although the stories range from free-for-all comedy reminiscent of Caldwell ("Why I Live at the P. O.") to the somber grotesque of family degeneration and suicide ("Clytie") and restrained sentimentality ("The Worn Path"), they are united by the author's preoccupation with one many-sided theme, a moral paradox: that the meaning of the action depicted is greater than the persons of the story comprehend. Thus they are impelled to act "unconsciously," even deterministically, the motives and the ruling issue being implied by the author.

Clearly, it is an attitude from which the writer may derive either comic or tragic interpretations. And Miss Welty fashions both. In "The Key" a husband and wife, deaf-mutes on their way to Niagara Falls in order to "hear" for the first time, find a key. It is mysterious, a sign, but of what? It must be cherished. In "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies" there is a comic dilemma—shall half-wit Lily be sent to the Ellisville "home" or marry the travelling player? Heads—tails. She marries. Other notable variations on the theme appear in "Curtain of Green," "The Whistle," "Keela the Outcast Indian Maiden," and "Death of a Travelling Salesman." As a consequence of her attitude, the author appears to keep a cool distance from her subject while yet analyzing it minutely, even caustically.

There are other consistencies of attitude and other thematic repetitions which the reader will wish to trace. Of these one of the most distinct and perhaps most useful in disclosing the writer's basic subject is the absence of fertility or the revulsion from it which Miss Welty's characters display. "It might seem that the extreme fertility of her garden formed at once a preoccupation and a challenge to Mrs. Larkin." ("Curtain of Green"). A husband drives a knife into the breast of his pregnant wife ("Flowers for Marjorie"). The spinster Clytie drowns herself after she has touched with her finger the face of a man. In the story that appears most nearly autobiographical a girl dreaming of the boy she loves is violently repelled at the sight of a family group tumbling in play on the beach ("A Memory"). Most

nteresting of all is the behavior of the convalescent travelling salesman stranded in the hills nd taken in for the night by a farmer and his wife. When the salesman discovers that the oman is not old but young, not the young man's mother but his wife, and with child, he ishes "that the child were his." Then, "on some impulse" he runs away into the night, dies.

These stories are to be apprehended as metaphors (about them certain details of unreality suggestive of Kafka's method), not as statements directly related to current events r drawn from a concern with a political future. They are projected against no particular ackground of assumed attitude in the reader. Despite their variety in subject, mood, and elineation of character, they are remarkably coherent in underlying theme and attitude. eing highly imagined stories, poetic in that sense as well as in compression of style, they eveal meticulously the author's mode of acute evaluation and the images of her mind.

HERBERT J. MULLER:

HARRY LEVIN: *James Joyce.* New Directions.

Harry Levin has written an excellent critical guide-book to the major works of James oyce. He provides the indispensable keys to all the esoteric themes in the background and he topical, autobiographical detail in the foreground; he points out the many linkages with nodern art and thought, from *montage* in the movies to semantics; he sets forth the whole pattern woven into the warp of historic necessity by the woof of artistic intention." He also mphasizes the deep sense of tradition in Joyce, and shows that his most revolutionary or antastic experiments have respectable antecedents; although more difficult, they are not lifferent in kind from the experiments of Rabelais, Browne, Swift, Sterne, or Melville. In ppraising as in describing the whole performance, moreover, Mr. Levin maintains an admirable tone. He does not write down to the reader or write up to Joyce. Unlike the chosen exagminers," the inner templars, he has kept his head during the elaborate initiation, not aking for granted the value and the necessity of all the rites; he is unafraid to say the bvious and commonplace, as when he remarks Joyce's "almost paranoid disregard" of any ther reader but himself (the "ideal reader suffering from an ideal insomnia"). At the same ime he does full justice to the strikingly original genius. Altogether, it is of course too early o write the definitive book on Joyce; but Mr. Levin's seems to me the best we have had yet, nd the better because he never pretends to be speaking the last word.

It is accordingly not as a challenge that I raise certain questions about the chapter on *Finnegans Wake,* the most illuminating in his book. "If there is any difficulty in what I write it is because of the material I use," Joyce once remarked. "The thought is always simple." Basically, indeed, the thought is even commonplace. Mr. Levin points out that his career spectacularly embraces the extremes of symbolism and naturalism, "richness and reality"; more specifically, his central themes are the city and the artist: the one lacking n beauty, the other without a community. Joyce sought to mediate between these extremes of life and art, but in effect he stressed their bitter opposition in the modern world; his attempted synthesis in *Ulysses* was "foredoomed to failure." In *Finnegans Wake,* however, Mr. Levin suggests that he finally solved his problem by taking leave of the "monumental ruins of the city of man" and depersonalizing the artist in a "symbolistic experiment." Although he here does a "gargantuan burlesque . . . of the entire cultural heritage," sums up the nightmare of history in a "proclamation of doom," the proclamation is "genial" because he has transcended the individual, the temporal, the particular. Through his night world, with its wealth of literary, historical, and Freudian symbols, he returns to "the public domain of myth"; his hero is mankind, his subject the total collective experience of the race; his frame is elemental nature, "the matriarchal continuity of the years," symbolized in particular by the river that endlessly flows on while all human controversies collapse into piles of dirty linen on its banks. (That *Finnegans Wake* is an orchestration of "Old Man River" illustrates the simplicity of Joyce's thought.) In brief, Mr. Levin interprets this final work as a judgment on the chaos that individualism has made of our world. The burden of all of Joyce's cryptic texts is the gospel of St. John: "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone, but if it die, it beareth much fruit."

Now, one can find in *Finnegans Wake* (as in Scripture) almost anything one ha mind to; but I have some difficulty in reading into it this "celebration of the communit and much more difficulty in actually feeling it, reading it out. It seems to me an arbitr design for the book rather than its animating idea, or at most a purely intellectual concept —like the abstract Love that Henry Miller now celebrates while he remains blithely indiffer to the sufferings of his fellowmen. Mr. Levin also remarks that, having left the Chur Joyce was never able to participate in any other communion, religious, literary, or social, a that there is a less substantial residue of human sympathy in all of *Finnegans Wake* than the most tenuous sketch of *Dubliners*. Thus he confers "complete autonomy" upon wor which for him are not manner but matter; his synthetic language is literally "sanscree and if his amazing virtuosity, as Mr. Levin says, makes a wonderful game for readers w are not too "grim," there remains the question whether he has not sold his main text these "messes of mottage." At any rate, I risk the charge of grimness by venturing opinion that *Finnegans Wake* has essentially the same limitations that make *Ulysses* an satisfying masterpiece—a brilliant exhibition to be admired rather than a deep experience be shared.

Specifically, Mr. Levin brings Joyce back to the community by means of a rat ambiguous use of the term "symbolism." He begins with the restricted meaning: the the and practice of the French Symbolists, whose severe limitations he recognizes. He ends w a very broad definition that covers almost any departure from literal, unimaginative natu ism. Hence he is able to point to a contemporary trend toward symbolism: Malraux a Hemingway are exalting a "tragic hero," Steinbeck's themes have "legendary proportion Sholokhov continues the "epic strain" of Tolstoy, Silone has converted Italian folk-ta into "anti-fascist fables," Mann is celebrating "the typical and the mythical"—all are pay "belated homage to the idols of the tribe." This is indeed a healthy tendency. But it rep sents something different from the symbolism of Mallarmé—and Joyce's closest affinities still with the early movement. These later writers are achieving a vital synthesis of "richn and reality," a harmony between art and life; to put Joyce in their company, as Mr. Le does, only makes plainer his remoteness from the idols of the tribe, his failure to come really satisfactory terms with the modern world.

This failure is surely understandable. Contemporary artists have plenty of reason complain of their world; today only the most provincial of modernists can be very proud it. Nevertheless it is too easy to explain away and excuse everything as the fault of t dreary, dreadful age, and to say with Mr. Levin that when we condemn Joyce we conde ourselves. We may be humble and still say that Joyce aggravated his problem because did not take to heart the gospel of St. John. He romantically idealized the artist, as set wholly apart from the bourgeoisie; he romantically magnified the ugliness of the c as if the medieval city were not also squalid and crowded with vulgar citizens. And beca it is now the fashion in critical circles to exaggerate the plight of the contemporary wri I should emphasize that the thought behind Joyce's fabulous creations is not only simple rather sentimental.

HUBERT CREEKMORE:

Five Young American Poets: 2nd Series. New Directions.

Whether the second group of New Directions' poets is better than the first is inevitable question, although it is of no concern in determining the value of the work. us have the matter over, then, and say that they show more variety, less classroom me physics, and less ability to say anything in their "Notes on Poetry." Only two of the po have taught in colleges, one is in the army, one came up in life the hard way, and poetess writes radio plays. All of this may be a good omen for the next crop, except t most of these stretched the rules of admission by having published volumes, however sl

Clark Mills, who has four books (including two of translations) to his credit, ta advantage of the limitations of space to get in one more poem by writing his "Note Poetry" in poetry. As poetry or a note on it, I would call it a fraction above so-so. Sc of his other work, especially "The Circle of Sleep," rises far above such a non-commi rating. Although they have a feeling of detached observation rather than of perso

emotion, they are clean in execution and restrained in imagery.

Paul Goodman and Jeanne McGahey use most of their space for play-poems, which are their best pieces. Goodman's "Cain and Abel" presents a rational view of the Biblical story, with a CC injection of psychiatry. The result is a critique of the Bible as irrational—an "alienation" which Goodman explains in his comments. His use of human motivation (which I have loosely called psychiatry) allows him to make convincing a "paradoxical and trans-finite" story. An appealing quality of artful naivete transfuses this play and a poem about homesickness. Unfortunately, the last paragraph of his comments, dealing with his versification, has a quality of naivete which is not artful.

Miss McGahey's witch play, "The White Box," is the old story of how beautiful the devil (or death) can be if you decide to embrace him. It has lyric atmosphere and a quivering fog over all the motives and conflicts that make the play. The "Note on Poetry" contains astonishing statements I did not expect to find re-discovered. "I think that any device of speech . . . used in designs with compression and economy—and used by a poet—will make poetry," she says; and later she declares her interest in "the use of imagery in which the appeal is sensory." "Design crowds out logic—and should do so," she says; or does logic make design? "I believe that esthetic meaning exists only as surfaces." And she ends by hoping that the reader will be blocked away from the meaning of the poem by the surface; but there is not enough "surface" to her poems to obscure their meaning completely.

David Schubert comes close to realizing Miss McGahey's ideal of poetry, even if his meaning, also, is discoverable. But Schubert says, "Without this music of vowel and consonant there is simply no poem . . . this dance of sound must be married to a responsible intelligence before there can occur the poem. Naturally, they are one: meanings and music, metaphor and thought." And he demonstrates his theory in the poems, which are perhaps the most intense and lyrical of all in this book. His achievement is the more remarkable since his material is the life he experienced in growing up "the hard way." There is no stridency, yet no flatness; no forcing of points, yet no befogging of intent.

Closest to Schubert in subject matter is Karl Shapiro, who says, "I write about myself, my house, my street, and my city, and not about 'America,' the word that is the chief enemy of modern poetry." And he does it well; the poems are direct, unaffected, and strongly felt. To me, after the first poem in free style, the collection seems as even in achievement as any I have seen. I am afraid, however, that his control is merely technical, and not emotional also, as is the case with Schubert. For there are passages, when Shapiro is not picturing his scene and life, when he is invoking a larger implication, that sound forced and uncertain.

W. R. MOSES:

The Language of Poetry, edited by Allen Tate. Princeton University Press.

This book, one of the *Mesures* series in literary criticism, consists of four essays, one each by Philip Wheelwright, Cleanth Brooks, I. A. Richards, and Wallace Stevens, read to audiences at Princeton University during the spring of 1941 under the auspices of the Creative Arts Program It is a part, though a relatively slight one, of the contemporary defense of poetry against the overweening contentions of science and pseudo-science; defense designed at least to show, to use an expression of Tate in his preface, that though poetry is not science it is not nonsense.

Within that general intention, the essays are not all similarly motivated. Those of Brooks and Richards ("The Language of Paradox" and "The Interactions of Words") are what we loosely call semantic studies, concerned with one aspect—which tends to ramify into all aspects—of the nature of poetry. (Brooks: poetic language *must* be paradoxical, cannot be the stabilized language of science; and Richards: a word is really its interactions with other words, so that the words in a poem by Donne are different from those in a poem by Dryden, and so on.) These essays are perspicuous and intelligent, though they do not, I believe, add a great deal to ideas contained in the longer works of the same authors.

Wheelwright and Stevens ("Poetry, Myth, and Reality" and "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words") also write of the nature of poetry, but seem more concerned with commenting on the present condition of poetry, and analyzing the reasons for it. Though expressed in different enough language, their conclusions are substantially the same. (Wheelwright: because we are today almost wholly occupied with the relations between individuals and phenomena, and have lost our sense of myth, which is the force connecting the community with the great Mystery that gives life radical meaning, our poetry today is comparatively unimportant; and Stevens: poetry needs interdependence of imagination and reality, but at present we have so much more reality—press of affairs—than imagination, that poetry is hard put to be about its proper business of helping men to live.) The generalizations in these essays are such as one unhappily feels, at least at the first shock, to be true; such, also, as make one want to know in a hurry what can be done to make them true no longer. Stevens, as I understand him, leaves change to the roll of history. Wheelwright's only suggestion, that we

do all we can to keep the seeds of myth-consciousness alive in our children in order th things may be better in the future, is rather forlornly made, and I suspect that those tryin to implement it are likely to feel forlorn likewise. There is this, too: we can hardly pass c to our children more than we have ourselves. (I know Wheelwright mentions seeds, b people after all are not hotbeds.) If our own myth-consciousness is insufficient to impro poetry and the world in general, how shall it do so any better when it descends into t possession of other generations?

CHARLES SHATTUCK:

VLADIMIR NABOKOV: *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight.* New Directions.

The delight of discovery is not the least of the pleasures in store for American reade who, in this novel, encounter Vladimir Nabokov for the first time. A Russian, of aristocrat origins, fluent in Russian, German, French, and English, with nearly twenty volumes a complished, Nabokov has long enjoyed high reputation in Europe. The fortunes of war hav now driven him to the United States. This is his second American publication, the first bein *Laughter in the Dark,* 1938.

What is most immediately apparent about Nabokov at this stage in his career is h utter control of style. However shimmering his metaphor or rich in suggestion his detail he nowhere abuses the devices of obliquity, he never wantons in mystery. The *experimenté* in style is always in danger of losing his reader. Naturally, in his pressure against the wall of language, he is likely to disappear, from most of us, in the clouds of plaster dust, smok and cobweb which his exertions bring down. How many pages of the writers we like be or admire most tell only of a dim shape moving or a whisper from a chimney. Nabok appears to have passed all this, to have gone beyond "experiment." He knows his tools b now. His demolitions are lightning-sharp and dustless, and his building is as swift and sur as it is solid. The effect is stylistic perfection—bright, clean sentences, delightful to the ey the ear, the finger-tips, and the mind.

AEROL ARNOLD:

ALVAH BESSIE: *Bread and a Stone.* Modern Age.

The murder trial of Ed Sloan occupies the foreground, but it is not the subject of thi novel, whose title comes from Sloan's memory of the scriptures: "Or what man is there that if his son asks for bread, he will give him a stone, or if he asks for a fish, will give hir a serpent?" The bread Ed Sloan asks for is life itself, which he comes to know only as h is about to die. The subject of the book is the growth in understanding through love betwee two people unlike in every way except one—that they have both been defeated by life. An to make his point Alvah Bessie forces his characters to accept what is a sordid and meaning less murder. It is as if he were reiterating, somewhere down in the bass of his tune, that t understand is to forgive all.

In the hands of a Dostoevsky this novel would have been a memorable experience, fo all the Dostoevsky elements are there: the humble, mindless man driven by humiliation firs into boastful lying and, finally, to protect his loved ones from imagined harm, to a gratuitou murder. The theme calls for great psychological insight. Mr. Bessie has the general pattern clinically speaking, his diagnosis is correct. But he has not written his novel.

The style is uneven, and in the manipulation of the time sequences—the attempt t carry the story forward from the time Sloan is arrested until the verdict is reached, and a the same time to fill in the background of the crime and build up the characters participatin in the trial—Mr. Bessie writes as if Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf had never lived The sandwich method he uses is mere machinery. The best that can be said for the book i that the author has a gift for handling the tender. In that he is not unlike the early Steinbeck

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published at the University of Chicago has presented in its January, February, and March issues the work of young writers, poets, and artists from colleges all over the country. These have been complemented by the work of such well-known writers as: William Saroyan, William Carlos Williams, Charles Biederman, David Daiches, Wallace Stevens, Robert Lowry, and others.

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